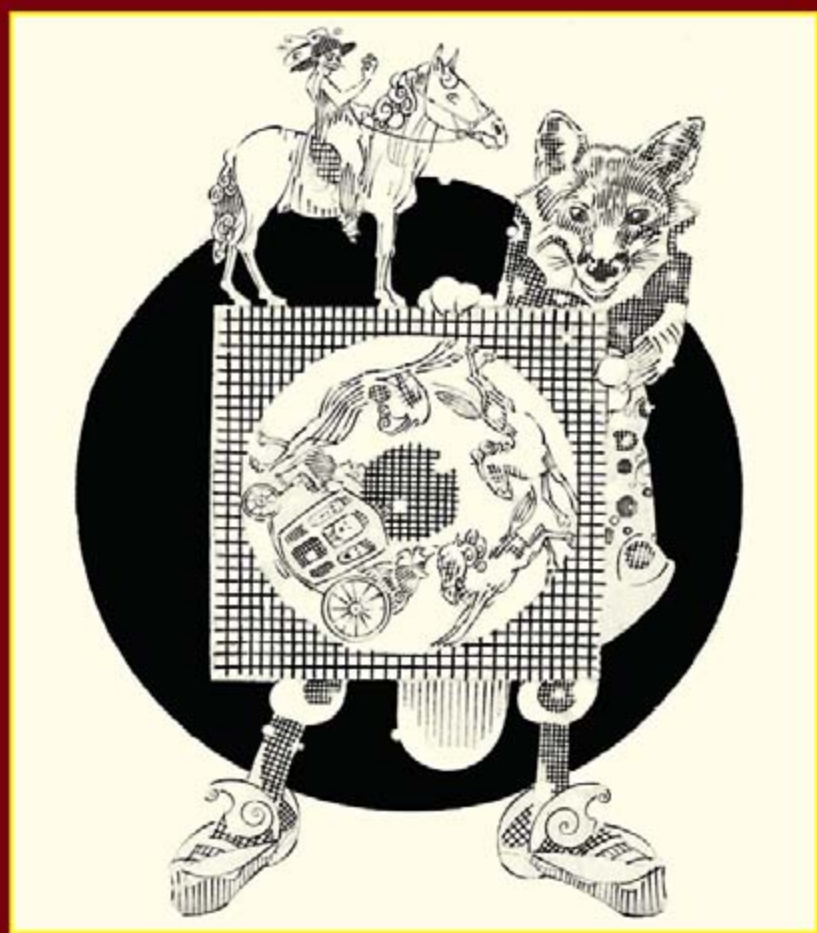


VOLUME ONE

THE COLLECTED  
SICILIAN FOLK  
AND FAIRY TALES OF  
GIUSEPPE PITRÈ



TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY  
JACK ZIPES AND JOSEPH RUSSO

ILLUSTRATED BY CARMELO LETTERE

# The Collected Sicilian Folk and Fairy Tales of Giuseppe Pitre

Volume 1 & 2



*Figure 1. Photo of Giuseppe Pitrè as an older man.*



*Figure 11. Drawing of Giuseppe Pitrè.*

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Translated and Edited by  
Jack Zipes and Joseph Russo

Illustrated by Carmelo Lettere

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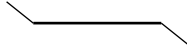
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*To the memory of my grandfather, Vittorio Pollina, who first told me some of these tales, and to my grandchildren, Maisie Wise Guzi and Phineas Butterworth O'Brien, to whom I pass them on.*

*Joseph Russo*

*To Pier Carlo Bontempelli, friend and bodyguard, and to my sisters, Phyllis Lakow and Iris Egan, great storytellers in their own right.*

*Jack Zipes*



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# Preface



There is always a tale to tell about most projects involving folk tales, especially the translation of unusual Sicilian folk tales that have been undeservedly neglected for such a long time. This project began in 2002, when I decided to translate Laura Gonzenbach's *Sicilianische Märchen* (1870) from German into English as a preparation for translating Giuseppe Pitrè's collection, *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani* (1875) from different Sicilian dialects into English. Neither the Gonzenbach nor the Pitrè collection had ever been translated into English before, and I believed—and still believe—that they were great treasures of European folklore and more valuable than the tales of the Brothers Grimm for understanding the breadth and depth of the oral tradition in European and Mediterranean countries. Since my knowledge of Italian at that time was in its formative stage, and since I was completely fluent in German, I decided first to translate the Sicilian tales that Laura Gonzenbach had published in German, and I began studying Sicilian in Rome and making trips to Palermo.

By the time the Gonzenbach collection was published in two volumes as *Beautiful Angiola* (2004) and *The Robber with a Witch's Head* (2005), I had become fluent in Italian and had a reading knowledge of Sicilian. So, I turned my attention to the indomitable Giuseppe Pitrè and was faced with the daunting task of translating well over 300 dialect tales and of doing research on *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani* and Pitrè, who is barely known in English-speaking countries. As luck would have it—and Fortune always plays a major role in Sicilian tales—I received a letter from Joseph Russo, an eminent scholar of Greek and Roman classical literature at Haverford College, inquiring about my project and asking whether I needed any assistance. Joe was born in Brooklyn into a Sicilian-American family the same year I had been born in Manhattan into a Russian-Jewish American family, and he had grown up with a profound knowledge of Sicilian. Both of us were from immigrant families, and there was an immediate elective affinity not only with each other, but also with the tales. At the time Joe contacted me, he had rediscovered Pitrè's tales that he had read to his mother while she was dying. They revived his deep connection to Sicily, and he felt strongly that the tales needed to be translated. Thanks to Dan Ben-Amos, chair of the folklore program at the University of Pennsylvania, he discovered that I had begun

work on translating Pitrè's *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari* and asked whether he could join the project.

To make a long story short, I thought the fates had sent him to me, and the collaboration we began early in 2004 has turned into a close friendship. Without Joe's erudition and special affinity for the tales, this book might never have been completed. We divided the task of translating all 300 tales and the endnotes equally, and we have consulted each other continually over the past three years. As Joe has explained in his introductory essay, it is virtually impossible to translate these Sicilian tales into English and to capture their style, flavor, and spirit. Nevertheless, we both believed and believe passionately that these tales deserve to be known in English and are a testimony to the creativity and imagination of the Sicilian people and to one of the greatest folklorists of the nineteenth century, namely Giuseppe Pitrè. Our translation is thus a modest endeavor to interpret and preserve these marvelous Sicilian tales that are steeped in the history of the common people of Sicily.

We would not have been able to accomplish what we set out to do without the assistance of numerous generous friends and colleagues, and we would like to express our gratitude to the many people who have contributed to this book.

# Acknowledgments



## Joseph Russo

My colleague and friend, Professor Dan Ben-Amos of the University of Pennsylvania, invited me to attend his Folklore courses in the 1970s and 1980s as part of my self-training in a new discipline, and more recently made the fruitful suggestion that I collaborate with Jack Zipes. I thank Pietro Citati, distinguished critic and extraordinary man of letters, himself descended from a Sicilian grandfather, who saw the importance of this project at an early stage. Professor Salvatore Nicosia of the University of Palermo was always ready to help me solve the meaning of obscure passages of Sicilian dialect and elaborate word-play. Professor William F. Hansen of the University of Indiana has long been a great inspiration to those who would combine Classics with Folklore. I have a long-standing debt to the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate Program in Folklore and Folklife, which thirty years ago welcomed me as a neighbor from a nearby institution and made me a folklorist. I am grateful to Haverford College for its generous support of travel and research, and especially to Elaine Hansen, President of Bates College, who as former Provost of Haverford was a strong supporter of my scholarly ventures. I am grateful to Jack Zipes who has been prime mover of this project and a great instructor in the art of translation. *In memoriam*, I owe a special tribute to that quartet of old Sicilian ladies, my mother Marianna P. Russo, my aunt Josephine Cambria-Curia, and my cousins Saveria and Anna Pacimeo, to whom I repeatedly read these tales and whose reactions and comments were crucial in drawing me back into the world of my youth. I also must acknowledge the courage and tenacity of my grandparents, Marianna and Vittorio Pollina, who in 1912 braved a long crossing to a new land where they created a *piccolo mondo antico* of Sicilian language and culture. And finally I thank my wife Sally Wise Russo, who journeyed with me to the ancestral town of Ciminna in 1961 and again in 2005. She has always been my Muse and best friend.

## Jack Zipes

My good friend, Professor Pier Carlo Bontempelli, accompanied me to Palermo on two occasions and provided great help and guidance throughout my

years in Rome. His acumen and sense of humor enabled me to overcome all sorts of obstacles while I conducted my research. In Palermo, I benefited from the warm hospitality and advice of my friends, Professors Rita Calabrese, Elio Calderaros and Michele Cometa at the University of Palermo, and Maria Concetta (Cetti) Sinosa, translator and theater administrator. All three introduced me to aspects of Sicilian culture that I might have never learned about. Professor Aurelio Rigoli, one of the leading folklorists in Sicily, kindly made all the resources of the Centro Internazionale di Etnostoria (University of Palermo) available to me. In addition, Professor Annamaria Amitrano, current director of the Centro, made all the facilities of the center and library available to me. Dr. Giuseppina Bongiorno and Dr. Giuseppe D'Anna were particularly helpful at the Biblioteca Vittorietti del Centro Internazionale di Etnostoria in the last stages of my research. The resources at the Museo Etnografico Siciliano "G. Pitrè" were especially significant for my research, and I benefited from the counsel of Eliana Calandra and from reading the numerous issues of *Il Pitrè—Quaderni del Museo Etnografico Siciliano*. My friends and colleagues in America and Italy, Cristina Bacchilega, Donatella Izzo, Wolfgang Mieder, Bill Germano, Nancy Canpea, and Carmelo Lettere, encouraged me and assisted me at various stages of the project. Without the joie de vivre of my wife, Carol Dines, and without her faith in me and my



Figure 2. Photo of Professor Aurelio Rigoli of the Centro Internazionale di Etnostoria at the University of Palermo.

work, I would never have discovered the wonders of Italian life and culture, nor would I have ever dared to translate these tales that have become part of our lives.

Last but not least, Joe and I want to thank Matt Byrnie for his sound editorial advice and strong backing of this project, and Stan Spring (New York) and Siân Findlay (London) for carefully overseeing the production of the book. We are also most grateful to Alice Stoakley for her extraordinary and thorough copy editing of such a huge and complex manuscript.





*Figure 3. Photo of Giuseppe Pitrè as a younger man.*

# The Indomitable Giuseppe Pitrè

*Jack Zipes*

The people who were the slowest and most difficult to be persuaded about the unique if not extraordinary merits of Giuseppe Pitrè were not the illiterates, but the cultivated people. For some time it seemed to them that the good doctor of Palermo, also a folklorist, had lowered the dignity of scholarship, humiliating himself by collecting scattered little stories that formed the domestic and traditional lore of the Sicilian people. . . . But the determination, constancy, and seriousness of Pitrè's studies ended up by generating a unanimous appreciation that, perhaps because it was so slow and gradual, reached the university, where it seems that a new science of comparative psychology of popular customs and traditions was born. Due to Pitrè's merits it was worthy of assuming this high office.

(Angelo De Gubernatis, *Italia illustre. Giuseppe Pitrè*)

If one were to name the greatest European folklorists of the nineteenth century, one might begin with the Brothers Grimm and move through the ranks of the enterprising British, German, Italian, and French pioneers and probably end with the names of James George Frazier, Arnold van Gennep, Joseph Bédier, Theodor Benfrey, Max Müller, Edward Tylor, Angelo De Gubernatis, Paul Sébillot, Jerome Curtin, Andrew Lang, Edward Clodd, Edwin Sidney Hartland, or Joseph Jacobs. Probably no one would list Giuseppe Pitrè, the versatile and brilliant Sicilian, whose works are totally neglected in the English-speaking world. Yet, Pitrè, more than the Grimms or any other folklorist of the nineteenth century, made greater contributions to laying the solid groundwork for major developments in collecting and preserving oral tales, songs, legends, anecdotes, and proverbs than any other scholar of his time.

Who, then, was Giuseppe Pitrè? Why has he been neglected?

Well, he was certainly not neglected in his time. In an obituary published in *The Nation* soon after Pitrè's death in 1916, the extraordinary American scholar Thomas Frederick Crane, a gifted folklorist in his own right, made this comment in comparing Pitrè to the Grimms:

Wide as the scope of their [the Grimms'] labors, it did not equal in extent the field cultivated by Pitrè, and after the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (*Children and Household Tales*) and the *Deutsche Sagen* (*German Legends*) the interests of the brothers became almost exclusively linguistic and lexicographical. Pitrè, on the other hand, was all his life a practicing physician, and took a prominent part in the civic affairs of Palermo, being Syndic, or Mayor, for many years. The Grimms were chiefly concerned with the tales and legends of Germany and its medieval literature: Pitrè throughout his long life devoted himself to every branch of folk-lore—popular tales, legends, songs, children's games, proverbs, riddles, customs, etc.—and collected himself an astounding mass of material, only a part of which is represented in the twenty-five volumes of the *Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari siciliane* (*The Library of Sicilian Folklore*, Palermo, 1871–1914).<sup>1</sup>

Born in Borgo, a lower-class district in Palermo, on December 22, 1841, Pitrè came from a family with a strong maritime tradition. His father Salvatore was a sailor and worked on transatlantic ships, and his mother, Maria Stabile, was the daughter of a seafaring family. Unfortunately, Pitrè's father died in 1847 from yellow fever while he was in New Orleans, and Pitrè and his younger brother Antonio were compelled to move into their maternal grandfather's house in Borgo. This early death brought the young Pitrè closer to his grandfather Giuseppe Stabile, and it also strengthened his mother's desire to further her son's education rather than to encourage him to become a sailor. Thanks to the support of her tightly-knit extended family and the help of a priest, she was able to provide educational opportunities and security for her two sons. Indeed, these close and warm relations among his relatives and friends in the Borgo district stamped Pitrè's positive attitude toward the common people his entire life.

Already, as a young boy, he began collecting proverbs, maritime expressions, and songs, and it soon became clear that he had a literary bent and was especially curious about the history of the common customs and beliefs of Sicilians mainly from the lower classes. When he turned thirteen, he entered a Jesuit seminary, San Francisco di Paola, where he received a rigorous classical education. He was among the best students at this school and had begun

1 Thomas Frederick Crane, "Giuseppe Pitrè and Sicilian Folk-Lore," *The Nation* 103. 2671 (1916): 234.

seriously to collect proverbs and to study the history of Sicily. During this time, however, the Italian insurrection against the Austrians erupted, and Pitrè, who, like many of his schoolmates, was a dedicated patriot, was inspired by the idea of an independent united Italy, which also included a liberated Sicily. So, he left school in 1860 to enlist in Garibaldi's navy, even though he disliked the sea and suffered from sea sickness. During the spring of 1860 he traveled to different port cities such as Marseilles, Genoa, and Naples, the only time he ever left the island of Sicily, and fortunately, he was not involved in any battles. When the uprising was quelled and the Italians defeated, he returned to Sicily to finish his studies and enrolled as student of medicine at the University of Palermo in 1861. His mother, her family, and a priest Francesco Coniglio continued to further his education, and Pitrè did not disappoint them. In fact, he surpassed their expectations. Not only did he excel in his study of medicine, but he also became an accomplished scholar of literature and history. During the five years of his studies, he began publishing articles on proverbs in the Sicilian journals *Borghini* and *Favilla* and taught Italian literature at the Conservatore di Musica. It was also during this time, in 1865 to be precise, that he made the acquaintance of Salvatore Salomone-Marino, also a young student of medicine, who became one of his most intimate friends and his closest collaborator in folklore research until they had a falling out some time toward the end of the nineteenth century.

When Pitrè completed his studies in 1866, he began teaching Italian literature almost immediately at the Ginnasio Vittorio Emanuele, a high school in Palermo, because he could not find work as a physician and because he now wanted to help support his mother and her family in return for all the help that they had provided him. However, he soon lost this teaching position because of a dispute with a vindictive official, who was later punished for indiscriminate behavior. As a result of this incident, Pitrè decided to begin practice as a private doctor just when a major cholera epidemic spread throughout Sicily between 1866 and 1867. He dedicated himself to helping hundreds of people stricken with cholera and soon came to realize how important it was to continue practicing medicine while pursuing his interests as a folklorist.

Pitrè either walked or traveled by horse and buggy to his patients, and it was often through contact with them and their relatives and friends that he collected and wrote down songs, proverbs, and tales. From this point on until his death, he became widely known in Palermo as the little doctor, who took notes and even wrote entire books while riding in his horse and buggy. Nobody dared disturb him while he concentrated on his work. In a revealing reminiscence of a visit with Pitrè, the Swiss folklorist, Walter Keller wrote:

And so we went down the stairs where his servant was already waiting for us in front of the house with an old-fashioned coach drawn by a single horse. "Please allow me to introduce my *traveling study*," Pitrè said to me and asked me to climb in.

"Padrone," the servant said to the doctor, "I've put the mail on the table in the coach for you."

Indeed he had! The inside of the coach had been transformed into a small study with a desk, and the walls contained all kinds of shafts, secret folders, and invisible pockets from which Pitrè took out manuscripts, books, magazines, and letters.

"You see," he explained to me, "for years I've taken care of almost all my correspondence in this traveling study."

"Aha!" I thought. "That's why the handwriting of his letters is so unclear and shaky."

"And it's inside here that I've written a good part of my books, always on the way from one sick person to the next. I can't conceive of how I could have otherwise completed my large collections and wrapped up everything during my lifetime. This coach bounces softly, as you can see, and Old Fritz, my faithful horse, doesn't trot very fast so that I can work here very nicely. You can get used to anything."<sup>2</sup>

And Pitrè always seemed to get used to everything. By 1868, he had gathered enough folk songs to publish his first major book, *Canti popolari siciliani* (*Sicilian Folk Songs*), based on a work that had influenced him as a young man, Giuseppe Giusti's *Raccolta dei proverbi toscani* (*The Collection of Tuscan Proverbs*, 1853). Pitrè's collection became the first in his twenty-five volume series, *Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari siciliane* (1871–1913), supported by Luigi Pedone Lauriel, one the first great publishers in Palermo, who was dedicated to Sicilian history and folklore. Their meeting was serendipitous, and their collaboration, exceptional. Pitrè never demanded money or royalty in these early years for his work, and Lauriel totally supported all his endeavors.

When Pitrè began his serious work in the field of folklore, he was not given much credit because folklore was not considered a respectable or significant field of research, even though numerous scholars in Sicily and Italy had begun publishing important works. In fact, he was often ridiculed by journalists and educators. When volumes four through seven of the *Biblioteca* appeared in 1875, published as *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani* (*Sicilian Fairy Tales, Folk Tales and Stories*), they were dismissed as vulgar, indecent, and trivial by many journalists, critics, and academicians, especially since the tales and stories were published in Sicilian dialect. Yet, it was precisely Pitrè's devotion to the neglected "authentic" traditions of the Sicilian people that

2 Walter Keller, "Zum Andenken an Giuseppe Pitrè," *SAV* 21 (1917): 94–96.

made his work so valuable. Unlike many of his predecessors in Europe, Pitрэ endeavored to provide accurate renditions of the spoken word and also wrote historical studies about the customs and belief systems of the Sicilian people to provide a cultural and historical context for his work. Not only did Pitрэ collect materials from his patients and friends, but he also recruited his own family to work with him—his mother, who had often sung sea ballads to him when he was a child, contributed to his collections—and he began corresponding with interested scholars on the island and on the Continent. Many of them sent him tales or information that he included in various collections. In 1877, he married Francesca Vitrano and had three children with her, Maria (b.1878), Rosina (b.1885), and Salvatore (b.1887). Although all the children helped him with his research, it was mainly Maria who assisted him in all his work until she married an Italian diplomat in 1904 and then went to Brazil. Pitрэ was always in need of collaborators, for his historical research and collecting were phenomenal, and he was always grateful for the least bit of information that pertained to Sicilian folklore.

As early as 1869, he co-founded the literary journal *Nuove effemeridi siciliane* with Vincenzo Di Giovanni and Salvatore Salomone-Marino, and this publication enabled him to share his work and to develop a greater understanding of the latest folklore research on the Continent and in England. The journal lasted until 1882. The year before publication was stopped, Pitрэ had been seriously ill, but during his convalescence, Lauriel persuaded him to start a new journal dealing mainly with folklore. So, together with Salomone-Marino, he founded the journal, *Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari* in 1882, and this famous publication, international in scope, lasted until 1907 and contained a wealth of folklore material. Moreover, as editor, he came into contact with many of the leading folklorists in Europe and America. Among his correspondents were Domenico Comparetti, Alessandro D'Ancona, Ernesto Monaci, Constantino Nigra, Angelo De Gubernatis, Pio Rajna, Michele Barbi, Benedetto Croce, Ernest Renan, Wilhelm Manhardt, Paul Sébillot, Hugo Schuchardt, Menéndez y Pelayo, Gaston Paris, Karl Krohn, Francis James Child, Rachel Busk, William Ralston, and Thomas Frederick Crane, to name but a few. This vast correspondence is significant because the letters (over 7,000) that he wrote and received reveal how erudite and knowledgeable Pitрэ had become with regard to other folklore traditions, how astute he had become in interpreting the immense amount of materials and documents that he had gathered, and how helpful he was when other scholars turned to him for assistance. While he was editing the *Archivio*, he also developed another series, *Curiosità popolari tradizionali* (*Folklore Curiosities*, 1885–90), in 16 volumes, which contained songs, proverbs, customs, and tales.

Impressive though these accomplishments may be, they almost pale in comparison to the 25 volumes he published in his *Biblioteca* between 1871 and 1913. In a certain sense, all these books constitute a major collaborative effort between Pitrè and the people of Sicily with the help of friends, scholars, and assistants. But the major responsibility for the conception of the *Biblioteca*—the notes, the editing of folklore, all the songs, poetry, legends, folk tales, proverbs, ghost stories, anecdotes, idioms, customs, medicine, clothes, utensils, and regional history—lay with Pitrè.

At the same time that he carried out his extensive folklore research and worked as a medical doctor, he was gradually drawn into politics. While Pitrè never joined a party and disingenuously considered himself unpolitical, the tenor of his work and his social background show how disposed he was to support the causes of the common people. And certainly, they had great trust in Pitrè, who had always prided himself on being frank and honest in all his relations. So, given his sincerity and popularity, he was “drafted” as a candidate and elected as an independent councilor (*consigliere*) of the Comune di Palermo and was soon regarded as one of the most beloved representatives of the people in his district. (Eventually, in 1915, he became a senator.) But his major passion remained the study of folklore. In 1909 he established the first folklore museum, Il Museo Etnografico Siciliano, in a former convent on the outskirts of Palermo, and it housed all the tools, costumes, pottery, etchings, and other artifacts that Pitrè had personally collected over the years. Finally, thanks to Pitrè, the first chair in folklore, which he called Demopsicologia (psychology of the people), was founded in 1911 at the University of Palermo, and he taught an introductory course on the history of demopsicologia in 1911–12; his lectures were only recently published as *La demopsicologia e la sua storia* (*The Psychology of the People and its History*) in 2001, ninety years after he had delivered them.

Yet, despite all the honors Pitrè received at the beginning of the twentieth century, he was devastated by personal tragedies in his latter years. His daughter Rosina, who had married in 1906 and had become pregnant the following year, perished in the Messina earthquake of 1908. His son Salvatore, who had graduated from the University of Palermo in 1911 and had become a medical doctor, died from food poisoning in 1912. His elder daughter, Maria d’Alia Pitrè, was his only child to survive him when he died in 1916.

### Pitrè’s Concept of Folklore

Pitrè’s attachment to the Sicilian people was profound and boundless, and because of this, he has often been criticized for romanticizing the Sicilian folk

and their traditions. Some scholars have charged him with creating an image of common Sicilians as pure, innocent, and noble “primitives,” downplaying many crude and deplorable aspects of the Sicilian folk and even the role of the Mafia as a criminal organization. Others have complained that he edited and censored some texts that he gathered with the purpose of establishing respect and honor for the Sicilian folk. In other words, his view as folklorist was allegedly skewed, and one critic has argued that his representation of the evolution of Sicilian culture resulted from many fixed binary divisions such as rural/urban and non-literate/educated that he conceived to uncover what he perceived to be the “authentic” Sicilian spirit. Some of these charges may, indeed, be true, but they are also simplistic, for it was precisely this passionate love for the common people, almost an obsession, that drove him to become more and more scientific in his research to grasp not only the “Sicilian” qualities in the habits, customs, rituals, and mentality of the folk, but also the similar modes of oral narrative representation and thinking that the Sicilians shared with other European peoples. Paradoxically, Pitrè’s romanticism led him to become more international, rational, and comprehensive in his research and resulted in his producing a huge treasure of materials that do not romanticize the Sicilian people or lead to their “romanticization.” If anything, his collections, historical commentary, and anthropological research reveal checkered and diverse traditions that demand a nuanced and careful analysis, even though it may be true that Pitrè, like all folklorists of his time, sought to fulfill his own personal mission to preserve the essence of the Sicilian folk and to open other people’s eyes, especially those of the educated classes in Sicily, to what he thought they were missing. At one point in the preface to *Fiabe, novelle e racconti*, he remarked that when common people in villages and cities were asked to explain the history of certain names, locations, or events, they always knew a great deal, but the educated people were at a loss because they never bothered to become intimately acquainted with this history. Pitrè wanted to compensate (perhaps over-compensate) for this neglect and sought to celebrate the accomplishments of common Sicilians. Certainly there was and still is a social class “split vision” in the way history is recorded and remembered in all cultures. In Pitrè’s times he saw himself as an educated scholar who wanted to turn over the smallest stone to see what was beneath it, for he believed that the hidden history of the Sicilian folk constituted the hidden treasure of Sicilian culture. Moreover, he came to believe that this culture had unusual links to other “primitive” cultures that revealed how the common people throughout the world thought, preserved customs and habits, and disseminated them through their stories.

As a young man Pitrè did not begin his work with a concept but with

intuition, great curiosity, and a deep attraction to Sicilian songs and sayings that grew from his experiences in the Borgo district of Palermo. As he began to write down Sicilian songs and proverbs and began studying them, he also started to take a great interest in contemporary writers and Sicilian history. His early publications *Profili* (*Profiles*, 1864), *Nuovi profili* (*New Profiles*, 1868), and *Saggi di critica letteraria* (*Essays of Literary Criticism*, 1871) reveal how broad his interests were, but there was a common thread in all these writings and in his reviews and articles in journals: he wanted to restore the significance of oral literature and live expressions in Sicilian history; more precisely, he sought to document the “authentic” art and history of the common people. This is clear in three of his other early books, *Sopra i proverbi* (*On Proverbs*, 1863), *Saggio di un vocabolario di marina* (*Essay on a Maritime Vocabulary*, 1863), and *Studio critico sui canti siciliani* (*A Critical Study of Sicilian Songs*, 1868). Perhaps the greatest influence on his work at this time was, as I have already mentioned, Giusti’s *Raccolta di proverbi toscani* (1853), which laid the basis for his comparative method and philosophy of collecting. But Giusti was not the only important scholar who stamped Pitrè’s development as a folklorist. In one of the most comprehensive and insightful essays on Pitrè’s work, Alberto Mario Cirese has emphasized that, though self-educated and driven by his passionate dedication to the Sicilian folk, Pitrè’s phenomenal personal development and work as a folklorist did not come out of nowhere. The period between 1850 and 1875 in which Pitrè began taking an interest in folklore—a revolutionary and nationalistic period—was also the formative phase of this field on the Continent and in England, and once Pitrè decided to embark on a career as folklorist, he read widely and voraciously. By the early 1870s, when he was still a young man, he had already learned German, French, and English, and his knowledge of international folklore and scholarship was extraordinary, literally breathtaking. He was familiar with all the most recent debates, discoveries, and publications in several different languages. As Cirese notes, the foremost Italian scholars and folklorists such as Constantino Nigra, Alessandro D’Ancona, Domenico Comparetti, and Vittorio Imbriani had already begun publishing significant collections and essays.

But there were also contributions closer to home in Sicily that were not lacking. We should not omit the possibility that Pitrè might have known or eventually discovered much earlier precedents (the Cantania collection of Giuseppe Leopardi Cilia that appeared in manuscript form approximately 1817 but was not published until recently; the notes furnished by Giuseppe La Farina in 1834 to Niccolò Tommaseo’s *Gita nel Pistoiese*; the few songs published by V. Navarro and G. R. Abati in 1843–1845); between 1857 and 1870 Sicilian culture manifested a lively

interest in popular poetry and literature, and Pitrè was certainly influenced by this development. Lionardo Vigo's *Canti popolari siciliani* appeared in 1857, and between 1870 and 1874 he transformed them in *Raccolta amplissima*; from 1865 to 1867 Letterio Lizio Bruno published texts and tales that prefigured his *Canti popolari delle isole Eolie* in 1871; in 1867 Salvatore Salomone-Marino (who had just turned twenty-one and was six years younger than Pitrè) notably expanded the horizon of the publications and the other works that were then common in Sicily with his book, *Canti popolari siciliani in aggiunta a quelli del Virgo*; in 1868 a Sicilian journal published Niccolò Tommaseo's letter, *Sui canti popolari*; in the same year Salomone-Marino showed how dedicated he was as an accurate researcher of the dates, facts and documents as he began to study the history of the popular Sicilian songs.<sup>3</sup>

The Italians and Sicilians were not the only important collectors and scholars for Pitrè. He also knew of Laura Gonzenbach, daughter of a Swiss merchant, who was born and raised in Messina, and had published the first and highly significant collection of Sicilian tales, *Sicilianische Märchen* (*Sicilian Fairy Tales*, 1870) in German. Her work was introduced by the German historian Otto Hartwig and edited by the meticulous scholar Reinhold Köhler, whose approach to the categorization of the tale types may have influenced Pitrè. Other German and Austrian scholars had already translated and edited noteworthy collections of Italian tales, and Pitrè was acquainted with these books as well. For instance, Georg Widter and Adam Wolf published *Volksmärchen aus Venetien* (*Folktales from Venetia*, 1866), edited once again by the enterprising Köhler in the *Jahrbuch für romanische und englische Literatur* (*Yearbook for Romance and English Literature*); Hermann Knust compiled his translation, *Italienische Märchen* (*Italian Fairy Tales*, 1866), also in the *Jahrbuch für romantische und englische Literatur*, and Christian Schneller produced *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol* (*Fairy Tales and Legends from Welsh Tyrol*) in 1867.

Before Pitrè turned his full attention to folk tales, however, he focused more on folk songs and published a revision of his *Sui canti popolari siciliani, studio critico* (*A Critical Study of the Sicilian Folk Songs*, 1868), the first edition of *Canti popolari siciliani* (1871) in two volumes, and *Studi di poesia popolare* (*Studies of Folk Poetry*, 1872), a collection of his essays and reviews. These three books constituted the first three volumes of his immense series, *Biblioteca delle tradizioni popolari siciliane*, and he had clearly determined that his life's work would be dedicated to recording every possible aspect of the art, customs, and history of the Sicilian folk. This "patriotic" commitment was,

3 Alberto Mario Cirese, "Giuseppe Pitrè tra storia locale e antropologia," in *Pitrè e Salomone-Marino*, 34.

of course, reinforced by the political climate of the times. Pitrè had supported Garibaldi's efforts to unify Italy in the early 1860s, and of course, he was gratified by the final triumph of Garibaldi's army over the Austrian forces in 1870 that eventually brought about Italian unification. For Pitrè this unification also allowed the Sicilian people to gain a sense of national pride, for the island would no longer be occupied and controlled by foreigners, and his so-called "*popolarismo romantico*" was an expression of this pride.

At the same time that Pitrè sought to extol the "genius" of the Sicilian folk and their culture, he was moving beyond this "romantic" glorification of the common Sicilian people and began grounding his folk tale collecting on a more concrete scientific and anthropological approach to understanding the history, evolution, and significance of all types of folk tales. General theories about the origins and spread of the folk tales leading to the formation of the literary tales were first conceived only at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Brothers Grimm, key figures in this development, believed that fairy tales were derived from myths that had been religious at one time, but storytellers had gradually discarded their religious connotations, and the tales eventually became more secular, containing remnants of religious rites and customs often referred to as buried motifs. Their views were expanded by Theodor Benfey (1809–81), a scholar of Sanskrit, who argued in his introduction to the Indic *Pantschatantra* (1859) that the genre of the fairy tale originated in ancient India as an oral wonder tale and spread first to Persia and then to the entire Arabic-speaking world. Eventually, they were transmitted to Europe via Spain, Greece, and Sicily through trade, migration, and the Crusades. The Grimms and Benfey believed that there was one point of origin or one place of birth (monogenesis) that led to the formation of different kinds of folk tales. In contrast, Joseph Bédier (1864–1938), a French folklorist, eventually opposed their views and developed his notion of polygenesis in *Les fabliaux* (1893); he maintained that the tales originated in different places and were cultivated by gifted storytellers. The notion of polygenesis had already been at the basis of the works of British anthropological scholars, Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917), Andrew Lang (1844–1912), and James George Frazer (1854–1941),<sup>4</sup> who maintained that, since the human species was similar throughout the world, humans responded to their environment in similar ways giving rise to identical tales that varied only according to the customs developed by different cultures. They preceded and

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History* and Giuseppe Cocchiara, *Storia del folklore in Europa*, translated by John N. McDaniel, as *The History of Folklore in Europe*.

differed from Bédier in that they believed that the common people as well as gifted storytellers cultivated the tales in their rituals and customs. For these scholars, the oral wonder tale was one among different genres or types of tales that were cultivated throughout the world, often with similar plots and themes. In particular, Tylor's two early works, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (1865) and *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom* (1871) left a deep impression on Pitrè, and he often referred to Tylor's notions in his writings on folklore. In Aurelio Rigoli's significant study of Tylor's influence on Pitrè, *Il concetto di sopravvivenza nell'opera di Pitrè* (The Concept of Survival in the Work of Pitrè), he points out that Pitrè agreed with the basic tenet of Tylor's notion that folklore was a conglomeration of relics that originated among primitive peoples; they were kept alive and survived through the comportment, belief systems, and customs of the common people. As Rigoli notes, Pitrè was more cautious about attributing everything in folklore to relics of survival. Yet, Tylor's ideas form the underlying ideas in Pitrè's work, and by the time Pitrè concluded the last volume of his *Biblioteca* in 1913, he noted:

Anthropology and psychology have replaced history in many points, and with a precise and refined examination, these fields of study want now to explain the deformed residues of myths, superstitions, and symbols from ancient times. That which has existed in the human psyche for many years—that which has not been fully recovered according to the intelligent ethnological theory of Tylor—constitutes part of our own unconscious, transparent in our mental attitudes, in our poetical metaphors as well as in our philosophical concepts. It is the basis or substratum that explains the survival of tendencies, of particular ways of feeling and thinking in contention with all the other psychological manifestations.<sup>5</sup>

What is important to bear in mind is that Pitrè's reading of Tylor and other scholars reveals that, even by the early 1870s, though Pitrè left the island of Sicily only once as a young man, and though it is uncertain how and when he developed the capacity to read English, French, German, and Spanish, not to mention many different Sicilian dialects, he had become an accomplished *international* folklorist with a comprehensive theoretical knowledge of developments largely in Europe—and later in North America through his correspondence with Thomas Frederick Crane. He was familiar with the most important folklore collections and scholars of folklore, and his early small publications such as *Saggio di fiabe e novelle popolari siciliane* (A Study of Sicilian Fairy and Folk Tales, 1873), *Nuovo saggio di fiabe e novelle popolari*

5 Giuseppe Pitrè, *La famiglia, la casa, la vita del popolo siciliano*, 437–38.

*siciliane* (*A New Study of Sicilian Fairy and Folk Tales*, 1873), *Otto fiabe e novelle siciliane* (*Eight Sicilian Fairy and Folk Tales*, 1873), and *Novelline popolari siciliane* (*Sicilian Folk Tales*, 1873) indicate his wide interest in drawing parallels between Sicilian tales and those published and disseminated on the Continent. By the time he published the four volumes of *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani* in 1875, he had come to realize that the Sicilian tales were not only representative of Sicilian culture and could be connected to the deeply entrenched customs, beliefs, superstitions, behaviors, and history of the Sicilian people, but they were also linked to the tales of other cultures that were engendered and evoked by comparatively similar natural experiences. If there were similarities in the Sicilian tales that could be traced to other European and Oriental collections, he attributed them to the fact that humans express themselves more or less in the same way when the conditions of the environment and psychology are comparable. Here he was very much in accord with Tylor's *Primitive Culture* and other British anthropologists who proposed that humans have the same instincts and thus tend to produce similar tales. Though Pitre did not discount communication, commerce, war, travel, theater, professional storytellers, and religious ceremonies that can account for the spread of particular tale types, he fundamentally believed that it was human nature and the human response to the environment that led to the same tale types. What was significant for Pitre, and exciting, was the manner in which people from different regions of Sicily—and for that matter, the world—changed and varied the motifs of well-known tales or created tales based on their peculiar and particular experiences to contribute to a so-called “minor” history. For Pitre the minor was major. As he wrote: “History should not be a list of men, in which their outstanding acts are registered, but the revelation of ideas, passions, customs and civil interests, in short, of the life of a people, of a nation.”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, he took a political stance:

The history of the people is confused with that of its oppressors . . . : their story has been taken and made into the same history of its governments without taking into consideration that they, the people, have a memory that is very different from that which is often attributed to them, whether it be from the side of the institutions or from the predominant powers.<sup>7</sup>

Collecting was for Pitre a “subversive” act, and his diverse collections, taken as a whole, were intended to offer an alternative to the official history of Sicily.

6 Giuseppe Cocchiara, *Pitre, la Sicilia e il folklore*, 142.

7 *Ibid.*, 142.

Collecting “relics” of the past that had survived into the present was thus an ethical act, and his definition of “demopsicologia,” in his inaugural address held at the University of Palermo on January 12, 1911 makes this clear:

For us demopsychology studies the moral and material life of civil people and non-civil people. The less civil they are, the more important the material is. This life is documented by diverse genres of the oral and objective traditions. Fairy tales and fables, stories and legends, proverbs and maxims, songs and melodies, puzzles and riddles, games and amusements, toys and playthings, performances and festivals, habits and customs, rituals and ceremonies, practices, beliefs, superstitions, fads, the world of manifestations and the occult, the real and imaginative world. This world moves, agitates, smiles, and moans at whoever knows how to draw near to it and to understand it. Its smiles, moans, and voices, insignificant for most people, are revelations for the man of science who senses the long echo of open-hearted and fading generations of past centuries.<sup>8</sup>

Pitrè was not simply interested in resuscitating the past, but he wanted to endow it with meaning in the present.

The demopsychologist, after having examined the current tradition, confronts it with the primitive traditions that are still alive and establishes the entity, and in this way he finds the solution to some obscure problem of the moral story of humankind: two processes, one of psychic paleontology and the other critical anthropology.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, Pitrè sought to contrast and compare all the “relics” of the past with those from other cultures. If certain customs and belief systems remained alive in the diverse regions of Sicily, they had very particular reasons that needed historical explanation and could be best understood when comparing them with similar traditions in other cultures. This is one of the reasons he became so international in his research while remaining so dedicated to the Sicilian people.

### Pitrè's Methods and the Historical Significance of his Collection

When Pitrè began professionally to collect songs, proverbs, and tales, he was a young man in his twenties, and as I have emphasized, he did not have a clearly defined method or concept of folklore. His approach to collecting oral tales, proverbs, riddles, and songs evolved as he realized that the preservation of

8 Giuseppe Pitrè, *La demopsicologia e la sua storia*, 34–5.

9 Ibid., 36.

oral storytelling entailed a combination of meticulous research and a deep theoretical understanding of the problems involved in the transformation of the oral to the literary. It was clear from the beginning, however, that Pitrè wanted to give voice to humble and neglected narrators, whom he saw as the curators of Sicilian history.

Although there is not a great deal of documentation with regard to the exact methods Pitrè used in recording and editing all the tales, there is enough information to provide a reliable account of his work. As is well known, Pitrè did a great deal of collecting himself, especially in the district of Borgo, where he was well acquainted with two of his best informants, Agatuzza Messina, whom he knew as a child, and who told him forty tales, and Rosa Brusca, who worked as a weaver and eventually became blind. He had apparently also met another important narrator, Elisabetta Sanfrantello, who worked as a servant in Valledlunga. About 60 percent of the tales that he collected were narrated by women. In this regard, his collection is more balanced than Laura Gonzenbach's *Sicilianische Märchen*, which consisted of tales almost entirely told by women and represented a particular feminine view of Sicilian culture. The tales told by men tended to be different in style and content, and thus Pitrè's collection allows readers to compare and contrast the manner in which women and men narrated their versions of well-known tales, legends, anecdotes, and the proverbs that they include.

Pitrè generally took notes when he heard a tale told in dialect, and based on a hearing and possibly two or three, he reconstructed the tale using a mixed method that enabled him to keep the phonetic sounds while at the same time keeping the dialect to make it as accessible as possible to a reading audience. In other words, Pitrè favored the Palermo Sicilian dialect as his standard in terms of spelling and grammar. However, colleagues, friends, and relatives brought him or sent him tales in different Sicilian dialects from all parts of the island, and he tried to remain as faithful to other unusual dialects and would explain the differences in his footnotes that often included several variants. Pitrè tried scrupulously to provide variants in his notes because he regarded the tales as ethnological, historical, and social documents. His erudition was so great by the time he put together the four volumes of his collection that he could refer to variants in all parts of Europe and the Middle East and could trace the history of certain tales to the Greco-Roman period, often working like a detective to explain the derivation and deviation of a particular tale. It is not clear to what extent Pitrè "censored" the tales or selected only those tales that reflected positively on Sicilian culture. Those critics who have asserted that Pitrè eliminated scatological references, brutality, and sexual innuendoes from the tales have clearly not read the entire

collection. Not only did Pitrè allow for “vulgar” language and stories with risqué and comical scenes, for instance, one in which a woman is made out of shit, but he also explained the metaphorical references to sex in his notes. If the majority of the tales are not as erotic, bawdy, and scatological as they might have been, it may be due to the fact that many of the tales were told by women with a different mindset than men. Yet, even the women did not shy away from sexual innuendos.

Pitrè divided the four volumes of *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani* into five sections: I. *Fiabe popolari comuni*, or common popular fairy tales, which constitute the bulk of the collection and include numerous fairy tales well-known in Europe and the Middle East; II. *Scherzi e aneddoti*, or tall tales and anecdotes; III. *Tradizioni storiche e fantastiche di luoghi e di persone*, or legends that deal with places and people; IV. *Proverbi e modelli di dire proverbiali spiegati con aneddoti e storielle*, or proverbial tales with anecdotes; V. *Favolette e apologhi*, or brief tales, fables, and animal tales. Altogether there are approximately 400 tales, 300 in the main body of texts, and 100 variants in the notes that immediately followed each tale. There is also an appendix with seven Sicilian tales in Albanian dialect that we have not included in our collection. Pitrè also wrote a preface to the four volumes and included two long essays about this history of popular tales and about the grammar of Sicilian dialect, which was later published separately as a small book.

If one considers that, after the publication of *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani* in 1875, Pitrè published other significant collections of tales such as *Novelle popolari toscane* (1878), *Fiabe e leggende popolari siciliane* (1888), and *La rondinella nelle tradizioni popolari* (*The Swallow in Folklore*, 1903), not to mention numerous tales that he printed in the *Archivio* and other journals, his collections constitute one of the richest sources of European folk tales in the nineteenth century, if not the richest. Pitrè was fully aware of just how fertile the tales were for understanding how European tales originated and were spread. Sicily had been a country that had been constantly attacked, invaded, and occupied by the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Turks, French, and Spanish for long and short periods of times. All of these occupations left their imprint on Sicilian culture, and many of the tales can be traced to storytelling traditions of these other cultures.

In her introduction to the late twentieth-century re-publication of *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani*, Aurora Milillo maintains that the core of Pitrè’s folklore program, and I would add, methods, can be ascertained in the first two tales in the collection, “The Tale Told Time and Again,” told by the 8-year-old Maria Curatolo in Erice, and “The Parrot with Three Tales to Tell,” told by Pitrè’s most gifted informant, Agatuzza Messina, in Palermo. Milillo

notes that, in the first tale, Pitрэ commented that nothing is arbitrary in a folk tale, which does not mean that everything is fixed. Significantly, this tale reveals that even the “infraction,” the breaking of formulaic rules, belongs to the structure and function of the folk tale. In “The Tale Told Time and Again,” the little girl Elisabetta wins the wager with the merchant and takes over his shop by *not* beginning her tale with the formula, “this tale has been told time and again.” By breaking with the rules, she shows that storytelling includes infraction, and that breaking the rules may be necessary to gain what one wants. The young protagonist of the story is opportunistic and clever, and she uses an original way of starting her tale to enrich and empower herself. There are other aspects of this tale that neither Pitрэ nor Milillo address that make it even more important as the initial tale of the collection. Not only is the narrator a female, but she is only 8 years old and tells her tale in an abrupt somewhat enigmatic manner that, for Pitрэ, represented the “pure” and “authentic” style of the folk. It is also a tale of assertion, a takeover, by a young peasant girl, who stakes out a claim to her heritage using a promissory note that entitles her to the property that the merchant occupies. As an announcement, Pitрэ’s first tale can be regarded in some ways as his staking out a claim for the Sicilian folk to regain what belongs to them.

The second tale, again told by a woman, but a woman in her seventies, who lives in the city of Palermo and not in the country, is a very different statement about storytelling and folklore. “The Parrot with Three Tales to Tell” ultimately derives from the fifteenth-century Sanskrit collection, *Shuka Sap-tatit: Seventy Tales of the Parrot*, and it is unclear how many intermediary stages and versions it went through in the oral tradition before it entered Agatuzza Messina’s repertory. What is clear, however, is that Pitрэ recognized its significance as a frame tale that, similar to many collections like *The Thousand and One Nights*, included several other tales that were connected to the meaning of the frame narrative. Just as the first tale reflects some of the brutal struggles over property and ownership and the necessity to tell one’s own story, so, too, the second tale is a frank commentary on the amorality of courting, desire, and seduction. Here storytelling is used by the devious notary transformed into a parrot to gain a woman who does *not* belong to him. However, there is a certain ambiguity in his tale-telling because in his three tales the notary depicts a courageous princess, who accomplishes amazing feats while searching for her lost doll. In the end she reclaims her doll and claims a husband at the same time. The princess has a “moral” right to her doll and proves her prowess by doing good deeds. On the other hand, the parrot or notary, who has sold his soul to the devil, connives and kills to obtain what he desires. While there is a simple and clear justice in the actions of the princess in the

three internal tales, the conclusion of the frame tale leaves us with a more complex sense of what is just. The notary winds up with the woman whom he has protected from another seducer, and only because of his brilliant ability to entertain through storytelling, he has won us over to some extent. We cannot be too upset by the death of the overly possessive husband or by the defeat of the other seducer. The art of telling stories, as Pitre's entire collection reveals, is more about learning how to survive under harsh conditions of life than learning how to lead a moral life.

Sicilian storytellers of the nineteenth century, no matter how much magic, fantasy, transformation, and humor were contained in their tales, always brought their listeners back to reality at the end. The endings or codas reveal how the storytellers were well aware of their own condition and the impossibility of realizing their fantasies. The verses vary, but the messages are similar.

And so they lived on as husband and wife,  
While we toil away without a life.

Now they are happy and content,  
While we sit here without a cent.

My tale's been written, my tale's been told,  
Now you tell yours, because mine is old.

They remained happy and content,  
While we still can't pay the rent.

Happiness was a fiction. Happiness was a wish that was bound not to be fulfilled in the lives of most of the storytellers and their listeners. But the stories were in and of themselves a fulfillment. The art of storytelling and listening enabled both tellers and listeners to extract meaning, "revenge," joy, and important knowledge from the narratives, just as storytelling continues to enable people today to confront their everyday vicissitudes. Though Pitre may have edited many of the tales in his collection, he did not negate their essence that reflected the mode of thinking of common Sicilians about work, sex, religion, law, other ethnic groups, money, and power.

One only has to read several of the Sicilian versions of "classical fairy tales" such as "Cinderella," "Donkey-Skin," "Rapunzel," "Beauty and the Beast," and "Puss in Boots" to grasp how Pitre respected the narrators' voices, and styles, and how he endeavored to record them as "authentically" as possible. Since most of these tales were told by women, they tend to be candid and stark depictions of extraordinary young women who cleverly shape their own destinies, in contrast to the male literary versions of

Straparola, Basile, Perrault, and the Brothers Grimm. For instance in “Date, Oh Beautiful Date,” the sprightly Ninetta (Cinderella) toys with a prince in his garden until he falls desperately in love with her. She constantly evades him at three different balls until he is at his wits’ end. The prince’s father must intervene to save his son’s life, and he actually proposes to Ninetta for his son. In “Pilusedda,” a version of “Donkey-Skin,” related to the Cinderella-type tales, a clever young woman escapes her father’s lecherous desires and uses three gifts from the fairies to entice a prince to marry her. In “The Old Woman of the Garden” (“Rapunzel”), after the young girl is abandoned by her mother, she is brutally treated by an ogress. However, instead of running away from a tower with a prince, she shoves the ogress into an oven and makes peace with her mother. There are several beast bridegroom tales such as “Marvizia,” “The King of Love,” “King Dead Horse,” and “The Serpent,” and in each one of the stories a young woman is put to severe tests to rescue an enchanted prince or to tame a beast. In rare instances, as in the traditional tale of “Beauty and the Beast” by Mme Leprince de Beaumont, she does this as a sacrifice to save her father, but more often she does it to prove that she is valiant, smart, and competent.

In classic fairy tales that feature men such as “Count Joseph Pear,” a comical version of “Puss in Boots,” the episodes often involve ruthless struggles. In this tale a peasant is helped by a female fox, not by a cat. And the fox helps the peasant to pretend to be a count and fool a king and his daughter. But the peasant is not grateful to the fox, and in the end he smashes her head so that the fox will not be able reveal to the princess that he is really from the lower classes. This brutal ending is not untypical in the Sicilian folk-tale tradition. Other tales that have been widely diffused and become popular in western culture such as “The Beauty of the Seven Mountains of Gold,” “The Magic Purse, Cloak, and Horn,” “The Fig-and-Raisin Fool,” “Water and Salt,” and “Master Joseph” do not mince words about the violent struggles experienced by protagonists who set out into the world to improve their station in life. Life was hard and cruel for most of the people from the lower classes, and the “relics” of the past that surface transparently in all the tales reveal the hopes and wishes for wealth, food, revenge, and power.

But there is also a lot of humor in the different types of tales collected by Pitrè. Many of the comical stories about St. Peter reveal an irreverent attitude toward this particular saint, who is often pompous and pretentious. In the tales about St. Joseph and St. Michael, the saint is depicted more like a fairy, a *fata*, than a biblical saint. The humor can also be very satirical. One of the harshest tales in the collection is “The Shoemaker and the Monks,” in which Peppi, a poor shoemaker, literally destroys a monastery and all the monks

because they are so corrupt. In fact, there is a strong anti-clerical strain that runs through many of the tales such as “The Monk and the Brother,” “The Priest and his Shepherd Friends,” “The Bourgeois Gentleman and the Preacher,” and “The Sexton’s Nose.” Though Sicilians tended to be religious and revered God, they did not revere the local priests and sextons all that much. They were also critical of each other and outsiders, that is, people from other cities, towns, and regions. Some of the more comical tales like “The Simpleton from Calabria” and “The Petralian,” deal with the gullibility of country bumpkins. Other stories such as “The Sicilian Thief and the Neapolitan Thief” and “The Neapolitan and the Sicilian” extol the cleverness of Sicilians, who always prove themselves smarter than the Neapolitans, just as some tales reveal how city people from Palermo become lost souls in the country.

Although there are some delightful nonsense tales such as “King Ridiculous” and “The Four Numskulls,” the most biting and humorous tales by far concern two “folk heroes,” *Firrazzanu* and *Giufà*. Though there are similarities between the two protagonists, they stem from two different traditions, and Pitrè pays homage to their roguish behavior that undermines the norms of decency by including fifteen tales about *Firrazzanu* and fifteen about *Giufà*. There may be some connection to the tales about the wise fool *Hodja Nasreddin* that began circulating in the Mediterranean and Slavic countries during the sixteenth century. *Firrazzanu* is also similar to the sly character *Bertoldo Bertoldino*, who was a popular figure in many regions of Italy. He is always conscious of what he is doing and generally profits from the pranks he plays. On the other hand, *Giufà* stems from tales told about a noble protagonist in the Arabic folk tradition of the medieval period, and he gradually took on a much more complex character. Unlike *Firrazzanu*, *Giufà* is not conscious or aware of what the consequences of his actions will be. He understands the world in a literal sense that leads him to do very brutal things. Often his mother must rectify his actions that cause the deaths of other people including his own sister. *Giufà* is clearly a fool, but he is not a wise fool. He is laughable because he always brings out the superstitions, amorality, and injustice in Sicilian society.

Pitrè did not shy away from documenting the contradictions of the Sicilian people. The latter part of his collection is filled with legends, stories based on proverbs, and animal tales that tend to be more realistic and historical than the fairy tales in the first two volumes. The legends read like landmarks of Sicily, telling a history of occupation and survival. The proverbs—and Pitrè assiduously collected hundreds in other books—ground the sayings in the customs formed by Sicilians over centuries. Many are similar to parables as

are the animal tales that owe a debt to Aesop. However, tales such as “Brancaliuni” and “Friend Wolf and Friend Fox” often end on a tragic note or with hard justice.

In my estimation, the four volumes that constitute *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani* are more important than the Grimms’ tales because there are over 400 texts, originally in Sicilian dialect, that cover a wide range of tale types often told in a rough and disjointed style. As a result, some of the tales are jarring because they lack description and are crude. However, for the most part, they have a charming earthy quality and reflect the customs, beliefs and superstitions of the common people in Sicily more clearly than most European collections of the nineteenth century portray the experiences of common people in their respective countries. As a side effect, they expose just how *literary* the Grimms’ tales are as well as other collections of tales written down by educated collectors in the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. Since these tales of survival have been passed on for centuries, they have a unique quality; their depiction of the world does not question the magic and impossibility of the events. Pitre felt great empathy with the people who recounted these tales. He kept their simple, frank words in Sicilian dialect and ironically felt compelled to instruct the educated on how to grasp what the “*popolo*” said and did. Though much is lost in an English translation, the tales can still offer insights into the power of the spoken word and can preserve to a certain degree a great heritage, one that deserves to be known in other languages.

# The Sicilian Folk Tales of Giuseppe Pitрэ

*Joseph Russo*

## The Language and Style of the Tales

**T**he tales collected by Giuseppe Pitрэ were told in several different Sicilian dialects and by many different tellers, so we cannot, strictly speaking, discuss their language and style as one uniform phenomenon. There are, however, many features of language that deserve comment so that the reader may appreciate the remarkable artistry of those who preserved these tales in their memory and recited them for Pitрэ and his collectors. The tellers of these tales were non-literate, and so their style is oral rather than written. It is fluent, lively, straightforward, highly idiomatic, and often playful, a perfect medium for these flavorful stories.

The language of these tales contains several different kinds of speech. We find many vivid folk idioms and metaphors;<sup>10</sup> exclamations, intrusions, and other self-referential comments by the narrators; direct questions from the narrator to the audience; proverbs, onomatopoeia, rhymed verse, and sometimes even song. In some places we have detected or suspected a pun or double entendre and have indicated this in a footnote. In addition, the tales regularly use certain fixed formulas, especially to open and close the story. The vast majority begin with the equivalent of “once upon a time,” *’na volta c’era*, “they tell the story,” *si cunta*, or “here’s a tale told time and again,” *si*

<sup>10</sup> Many of these are commented on in the footnotes. As a sample, consider three that occur in close succession in “The Headstrong Son”: “around 4 a.m., when not even a fly was walking around and you could cut the darkness with a knife”; “you could hear such a snoring that it seemed they were sawing tables”; “they scared him so shitless that people still talk about it to this day.”

*cunta e s'arricunta*. Those that are true *Märchen* or fairy tales usually end with a rhymed couplet contrasting the happiness of the characters in the tale world with the poverty in the real world of the tellers and their audience. These formulaic openings and closings are clear markers that we are entering into and departing from the make-believe world of the story. Within that world of wishful imagination, the good are rewarded and they see the wicked punished; whereas back in the everyday world, they have to live with the poverty and unhappiness that are their daily lot. As a typical concluding couplet puts it, "And so they lived on, happy and content, while we remain here without a cent."

We also find repeated formulas within the body of the tales, typically used for making a transition, like "now let's leave her and return to the prince," and for correcting an omission by inserting the missing element belatedly, like "Incidentally, I forgot to say that . . . ." Besides these transition and correction formulas, there frequently appears what we may call a "jump-forward" formula, translated as "time passes quickly in a story" or "the tale moves quickly," literally "the tale doesn't admit time," *lu cuntu 'un menti tempu*. And frequently, when a character is forced to make a hasty departure, we find the special "escape" formula, "blessed feet, help me now!"—*santi pedi, ajutatemi*.

Besides all these special kinds of speech, the tales are greatly enlivened by a heavy use of dialogue. Such exchanges often go on for several lines with no change of speaker specified, since the storytellers could have acted out different voices to make it clear who was speaking. Our translation sometimes adds phrases like "he said" or "she replied" for the sake of clarity. This frequent dialogue helps us imagine how effective these tales would have been in performance.

We may imagine the normal performance situation as similar to what we know from other living oral traditions: the tales would have been told in private homes to small groups consisting primarily of family and close friends. But what we have in Pitрэ's collection is something different. Pitрэ and a small number of associates sat down with the tellers, asked them to recite a tale, and either took it down by dictation or wrote it down from memory shortly afterward. Hence we have the approximation of a performance but not the thing itself. Pitрэ's notes are invaluable testimony to a range of supporting elements, both verbal and non-verbal, that the tale-tellers added to enliven their performances. Hand gestures are a major example of such "para-linguistic" enhancements, and it is fascinating to see Pitрэ's footnotes mentioning that the narrator held her hand up waist high to indicate the height at which a lantern was carried, or replaced a taboo word with a certain suggestive gesture. What functions as the equivalent of a punch line at the end

of “With the Scissors” is a non-verbal signal, the hand gesture of the wife who, while sinking to the bottom of the well, continues to insist that she is right by making a scissors sign with her two fingers.

The texts that Pitrè printed contain a fair number of inconsistencies and non sequiturs. It is impossible to determine which of these come from the tale-tellers and were faithfully recorded and which may have been caused by the collectors’ own memory lapses or failure to take perfectly accurate notes or dictation. We have usually corrected small blemishes without calling attention to them, but in a few instances we have left them standing and added a footnote commenting on their value as evidence of what a live performance might contain.

Any discussion of the language and style of the tales must call attention to the exceptional verbal resourcefulness we find in some tales. Several contain a large proportion of folk poetry of considerable, and at times even exquisite, quality, and many have their most crucial moments expressed in verse. “The Tale Told Time and Again,” which opens this collection with an important statement about storytelling conventions and the license to break them, resorts to verse for the heroine’s brilliant triumph over convention. “The Left Hand Squire” concludes with a complex three-way dialogue in verse, in which the squire’s unjustly accused wife first expresses her distress in the form of a riddle rich in metaphor, her husband responds by continuing the riddle’s metaphors and maintaining his accusation, and the king intervenes with a verse statement that correctly solves the riddle and exonerates the good wife. The outstanding tale, “The Pot of Basil,” has its entire structure built on the clever contest in verse between Rusidda and the prince, and near its climax the narrator breaks into poetry to describe the heroine’s appearance disguised as a doctor to cure the lovesick prince. We can easily imagine how, in the performance of these tales, dramatic verse recitation would have been a key element of the entertainment. “The Barber’s Clock,” a brilliant mixture of social satire and theological allegory,<sup>11</sup> relies on clever verse to paint its vivid satirical portraits of social types. “The Count’s Sister” and “Virgil the Sorcerer” break into poetry at their dramatic conclusions, and this list could go on at length.

While vivid idioms, metaphors, and poetry are scattered throughout all these tales, in some places we find word play carried to a very high degree of complexity. The tale “Pinniculu Pinnàculu Pinnía” is meant to explain the

11 Italo Calvino was forcefully struck by the brilliance of this tale, saying it is “on the level of the great moments of allegorical poetry” and “the poetic interpenetration of metaphysical space and the human comedy is so precise and harmonious a construction, with a language so rich in invention, nobility, and characterization” (*Italian Folktales*, p. 750).

origin of a riddle whose first line consists of these three words. At first reading this seems to be no more than a euphonic sequence of nonsense words, built on the syllable “pinn” to which various suffixes have been attached. But when we reach the end of the tale in the original Sicilian, we realize that the nonsense words contained hidden meaning. The story describes pears hanging from a tree, and the verb “to hang” in Sicilian is *pinniri* (Italian *pendere*), so that the idea of hanging is subtly evoked by these three cleverly constructed words. The pure indulgence in word play for its own sake achieves unique form in “King Ridiculous.” Here there is barely a story line, as we are swept up in a creative intoxication with rhythm, rhyme and punning innuendo resulting in a fine comic absurdity. It sounds like the James Joyce of *Finnegan’s Wake* mixed up with Chico Marx, and anyone who understands Sicilian or Italian should find the original and read it aloud. Verbal wit of this quality is the despair of the translator, and what we offer is our humble attempt to capture some similar effects in English.

### Contents and Typical Themes

While the special qualities of language to which we have called attention are inevitably lost in translation, the contents of the tales can be fully appreciated by the English reader. We enjoy the tales’ clever and adventurous heroines and heroes, the satirically depicted social hierarchies within which they must operate, and their abundant fantasy, humor, irony, and sense of justice—a justice often achieved through that cardinal Sicilian virtue, the talent for revenge.

We may, however, be risking a different kind of loss in translation—not a linguistic loss but a cultural one—if we fail to see these tales in their historical and social context. The Sicily in which these tales were created and transmitted was an island populated largely by poor country folk and tradesmen, with a tiny aristocracy holding most of the wealth. While some merchants might become wealthy, the vast majority of people lived off the land, growing what food they could and maintaining what animals they could afford. This rural economy turns up often in the tales, many of whose protagonists are living hand to mouth and looking for ways to get a bit of food or money. Indeed, it is striking how often the tales mention food, hunger, and eating.

The society pictured in these tales is a mixture of realism and idealistic fantasy, populated by peasants, shepherds, shoemakers, wagon-drivers and other tradesmen, and by kings and queens, princes and princesses, abbots, monks, priests, and holy hermits. Monasteries and abbeys become sources of opportunity and adventure, as do the royal courts that are conveniently

accessible to the traveling hero or heroine. Spain and Portugal appear often as kingdoms reachable by a ship that is always at hand when a character needs it, and their royal courts often serve as places of refuge and support. The royal courts in our tales usually include a Council of Advisors, summoned by the king—along with doctors or astrologers—whenever advice is needed. Stewards and other courtiers may play a role in the plot, sometimes as untrustworthy characters.

While the tales normally present kings and royalty in a more or less positive light, they offer a mixed view of the church and clergy. “The Shoemaker and the Monks,” for example, presents an entire monastery conniving to cheat and physically maltreat an innocent shoemaker, and “The Poor Young Man” even has the Lord come down from his cross to describe how corrupt the clergy are, enriching themselves at the expense of the poor. While monks and abbots may appear as good or bad, priests more consistently appear as corrupt and greedy. Hermits, on the other hand, are unequivocally virtuous, a rare exception being the hermit who lets himself be corrupted by the devil in “The Holy Hermit.”

Viewed from a comparative perspective, these tales run a wide gamut of international tale types. We find magic tales, tales of adventure, local and historical legends, religious tales, ghost stories, and humorous tales including their sub-type the numskull tale. The magic tales, or *Märchen*, include splendid examples of the best-known international types, such as Cinderella (“Date, Oh Beautiful Date”), Snow White (“Child Margarita”), The Animal Bridegroom (“The Little Mouse with the Stinky Tail”), and The Boy Steals the Giant’s Treasure (“Tridicinu,” a Sicilian equivalent of “Jack and the Beanstalk”). All of these, while conforming closely to the general type, possess a distinctly Sicilian flavor.

Among the most amusing of the humorous tales are those featuring husband–wife rivalry and real or imagined infidelity, and the anti-clerical tales, which embody the traditional Sicilian suspicion of an often-corrupt clergy. Occasionally these two themes overlap, depicting the priest as the wife’s seducer. It is worth noting that in “Three Good Pieces of Advice,” even though the priest is unjustly suspected, the suspicion itself is presented as not unreasonable. Another main category of humorous tales features the notorious Sicilian trickster-heroes Firrazzanu and Giufà, already discussed in the introduction “The Indomitable Giuseppe Pitrè.” As for the adventure tales, they conform to type by featuring a youthful protagonist who leaves home and achieves great success, most often through a royal marriage. But our collection is noteworthy for tales from female narrators that feature a bold heroine who is as adventurous as any male protagonist. This may seem

surprising given the patriarchal culture of Sicily; but we must realize that every force produces a counter-force, and in these tales we are seeing the female reaction to male domination, the creation of a fantasy-world where women out-maneuver men and repeatedly gain the upper hand. Prime examples are "Catarina the Wise," "Date, Oh Beautiful Date," "The Pot of Basil," "Pilusedda," "The Parrot with Three Tales to Tell," "The Seven Robbers," and "The Thirteen Bandits," among many others.

These tales also reflect a distinctly Sicilian world-view in their representation of social, economic, geographical, and political realities. Although we view these, to some extent, through the distorting lens of fantasy and exaggeration, certain realities emerge clearly. The most vivid memory in Sicilian political history is The Sicilian Vespers, a popular uprising against occupying French forces which took place in 1282. Several tales in this collection show how the folk memory preserved and elaborated upon this historical reality, turning the historically ambiguous figure of John of Procida into a folk-hero and supposed organizer of the uprising.

The agrarian economy is reflected in the frequent mention of food gathering and the importance of grain, which in some tales appears alongside precious gems as if belonging to the same category. Horses, donkeys, mules, hens, and roosters are the animals most frequently mentioned, while cats sometimes appear as household pets, and dogs less often. Mountains are often mentioned, as is the sea. Frequent use of travel by boat reminds us that Sicily is an island. Kings are assumed to rule everywhere, as they often did in medieval and early modern Sicily, and when they are not in Palermo they are most commonly in Spain and Portugal, and much more rarely in France, England, or Russia. Turkey is mentioned with some frequency as an alien land, and Turks are routinely used as "fall-guys" in these tales, sometimes specifically mocked as followers of Mohammed and for their pidgin-Sicilian. Thus we see reflected the historical reality of Turkish power in the Mediterranean in early European history. "The Devils of the Zisa" and "The Treasure of the Zisa" reflect the mixture of admiration and awe aroused by the presence of sophisticated Arab culture in Sicily.

Royal palaces occur frequently in these tales, and often have big gardens and stables managed by a resident staff. They also have underground chambers, where prisoners may be kept or passageways found. That some real history underlies this fancy may be seen from "What a Disaster for the Three Ladies!" The architecture of palaces as well as ordinary houses is such that they may face one another so closely that conversation can be held from one balcony to another. Here it seems a feature of ordinary people's lives has been transferred to royal palaces, serving narrative convenience and also bringing

royal families down to the level of the folk. One common theme closer to pure fantasy is the appearance of a hole in the ground that leads to a magical creature's dwelling—although even here, we must remember that Sicily is a land of mountains and caves, where tunnels and secret passageways were not as rare as they are in our own world.

While many of these tales have themes that can be found in the wider European tradition, a small number are unusual in the way they echo themes from Greek mythology. Given the widespread Greek colonization of Sicily beginning in the eighth century B.C. and the persistence of the Greek language and culture there for centuries afterward, it is possible that some of these themes survived from that early period, and passed from Greek to Latin and into the post-Latin vernacular that evolved into medieval and modern Sicilian. It is also possible that some of this story material entered Sicily at a later date, brought by Roman colonizers beginning in the second to first centuries B.C. A third possibility is that these stories were introduced into the local oral tradition much later by people who knew them from books, or who had heard them told by others whose ultimate source—perhaps going back over several generations of oral transmission—was a written version. There is no way to decide between these alternatives, or to say which themes from classical mythology came from which of these possible sources. What is clear is that these tales drew on material that had been in oral circulation long before Pitrè collected them, and that some curious and interesting survivals of Greek myths still existed as living story material in late nineteenth-century Sicily.

The most conspicuous ancient Greek motif is the presence of the Cyclops in two of our tales, "The Cyclops" and "The Little Monk." The most familiar Cyclops figure in Greek tradition, in book nine of Homer's *Odyssey*, is a giant with a single eye who feeds on human flesh and lives an isolated, asocial existence in a cave, where he keeps a flock of sheep. Odysseus and his men escape by blinding the giant in his vulnerable single eye. "The Little Monk" derives directly from this source, by whatever channel of transmission it reached the teller. This tale was collected from an eight-year-old girl who is an unskilled narrator, and the story line moves forward awkwardly with an absence of connections and transitions. Yet all the key dramatic incidents of the original Greek tale are present and vividly told. The other tale, "The Cyclops," keeps the name and attaches it to a cannibalistic ogre, so there is some glimmer of the ancient tradition, but in no other details does it reflect the Homeric model.

Another Greek mythic story, less visible on the surface than the Cyclops tale, is found in "The Enchanted Horse." We have a cruel king who demands

that golden hair be brought back to him from where it sits high in a tree, sends a hero on this quest, and attempts to murder him when he returns with the prize. The king is killed when the hero convinces him to seek magical rejuvenation by jumping into a boiling cauldron. This is the essential plot of the tale of Jason and his quest for the Golden Fleece. In the Greek version the tree is guarded by a serpent, whom Jason drugs with the help of Medea; and king Pelias is tricked by seeing an old ram thrown into the cauldron and successfully rejuvenated thanks to the magical herbs of Medea. In our Sicilian tale the tree is guarded by fierce lions, and Medea has been replaced by the enchanted horse as magical helper. The horse helps the hero get the “fleece” and also supplies the equivalent of Medea’s magical herbs in the form of his own sweat, which performs the magical rejuvenation necessary to trick the king into throwing himself into the cauldron. It is no less than amazing to discover this ancient plot structure still being used in the oral tradition of the Mediterranean. By how many intermediaries, oral and written, it survived and entered the repertoire of the anonymous storyteller in Noto, who gave us this tale, is a true mystery to ponder.

Still another well-known Greek story is found in “Hook and Crook,” this time not a myth but a folk tale. The historian Herodotus (mid-fifth century B.C.) recounts essentially this same tale as having happened in Egypt. This wonderful story was fully assimilated into the European folk tale tradition, and versions have been found in many different countries. Its international tale type bears the name “Rhampsinitus” after the Egyptian king whose treasure house was broken into. Again, we can only guess at the trajectory by which this widely circulating tale came to Sicily.

Roman tradition may have had some influence on the tales like “The King of Love” and “King Anìmmulu,” which belong to the same type as the “Cupid and Psyche” story told by Apuleius (second century A.D.). Apuleius’ story is clearly based on folk tale sources, although he has imbued it with strong elements of philosophical allegory.<sup>12</sup> While our Sicilian versions derive from two widespread European tale types, “The Search for the Lost Husband” and “The Animal Bridegroom,” they contain specific details that seem to come from Apuleius’ version. Both tales feature a supernatural bridegroom who resides in a sumptuous palace, and in “The King of Love” he is a winged creature whose very name makes him a version of Cupid.

12 See Graham Anderson, *Greek and Roman Folklore*, pp. 75–77.

## Our Aims and Choices as Translators

Given the rich linguistic texture of these tales, there is no way to capture their full flavor in English or any other language. What we have attempted is a recreation of the tales in idiomatic contemporary American English, to make them as natural-sounding here as they were in their own time and place. Therefore we have freely substituted modern idioms for those of the original, when those would seem odd or make poor sense if translated literally. For instance, we have said “he found himself in hot water” where the original says “he found himself in water of oranges,” *si truvau 'ntra l'acqua di l'aranci*; or “she gave him a thorough tongue-lashing” where the original says “she filled him up with so many curse words,” *lu jinchiu di tanti parulazzi*. We used the English idiom “Hook and Crook” for the Sicilian title “’Mbrogia e Sbrogia,” which involves word play that defies translation. In a very few cases we have altered the title of a tale to make better English sense or to better reflect the story’s contents—e.g., we changed “Lu custrieri,” literally “The Tailor,” to “The Tailor and the Dung-Maiden.”

These tales, as already noted, often use formal verse with strict meter and rhyme, and the majority close with a formulaic rhymed couplet, for which we have found English formulaic and rhymed equivalents. Since the Sicilian formulas vary slightly, we have allowed the same small variation in English. We have done our best to match verse with verse, although we have not been able to use rhyme in all cases where the original does. Often the Sicilian verse is folk poetry of impressive quality, and we have done what we can to capture its directness and verve. In many cases we have quoted the original in footnotes, where it can be enjoyed by the reader who may know some Sicilian or Italian or has a serious interest in languages and poetry.

Proverbs frequently appear in these tales, some spoken by characters in the story and others as titles of those tales that are meant to explain the origin of a familiar saying. Occasionally we have been able to match a Sicilian proverb with a familiar English one, but in most cases we have simply created the kind of concise and memorable phrase in English that might resemble a proverb.

Among our biggest challenges as translators was dealing with the narrators’ tendency to sometimes omit the kind of small connective words that make causal and temporal sequences easy to follow. We took the liberty of adding words like “then,” “afterwards,” “eventually,” “consequently,” and “he (she) said” to clarify connections, and of adding resumptive words like “now,” “well,” and “so” at the beginning of sentences to smooth the narrative flow. In a few tales told by less skillful narrators, in which episodes were unconnected and logical sequence was confused, we patched over these small gaps

and inconsistencies with no comment. In a few instances where the awkwardness could be instructive about the nature of narrative performance and the challenge of collecting tales like these, we made an observation to that effect in the notes.

We used footnotes, for the most part, to supply cultural or historical information important to the narrative, to make comments on extraordinary features of the texts, and to supply the Sicilian originals when the language was especially vivid or poetic. In our endnotes we used Pitrè's notes as our base, citing all the important parallels he noted in the works of scholars before him and giving English translations of every variant tale that he printed. Therefore, there are more than 400 tales in the entire collection. In addition, we cite parallels from European folk and literary traditions that were unknown to Pitrè or post-date him, and we sometimes offer interpretive and evaluative comments on the tale at hand. Every endnote begins by citing the appropriate tale type, if one exists, from Hans-Jörg Uther's recent *The Types of International Folktales*, abbreviated as ATU (Aarne-Thompson-Uther). Several Sicilian tales seem to be idiosyncratic and not related to the international types.

Folk tales do not shy away from crude expressions and scatological content, and these Sicilian tales offer their share of what some would see as vulgarity. It was noted in the preceding introduction that Pitrè tended to remove or mitigate sexual references in his editing of the tales, and yet these tales still do contain some coarse everyday language, which we have translated exactly as we found it.

One of our constant challenges was the rendering of proper names. Names were often kept in Sicilian, rather than normalized to Italian spelling, in order to retain the flavor of the original, so that Vicenzu does not become Vincenzo and Filippeddu does not become Filippello. Full consistency, however, was impossible, and if we thought a Sicilian name seemed too unusual or unrecognizable we used the Italian version, so that Sarvatori, for example, becomes Salvatore and Petru becomes Pietro. In some cases we resorted to the English equivalent, especially for names of saints and popes, where we have St. Joseph, St. John, and Pope Gregory. For status designations, *cavaleri* (Italian *cavaliere*), a standard honorific for gentleman status, was translated "gentleman" in "bourgeois" contexts, but in courtly contexts we have translated it as "cavalier" or "knight." The most challenging word to translate with consistency was *cumpari* (Italian *compare*), with its feminine *cummari* (*comare*). Originating as the term used to designate the person who stands with the parent in support of a child at baptism—hence godfather or godmother—it comes to denote anyone held in close affection, and can mean good friend,

crony, partner, or accomplice. We have used a variety of these renderings, letting context be our guide.

The goal we kept constantly before us was to respect the quality of the storytellers' language by reproducing it in English with nothing omitted and implicit meanings filled out to ensure they would not be overlooked. Comparison with the forty-three tales from Pitrè's collection that Italo Calvino included in his *Italian Folktales* will make it clear how different our conception of the translator's task is from his. Not only did Calvino abbreviate by omitting details and repetitions, but he routinely suppressed signs of a living voice, such as the narrator's asides to the audience ("and what do you think he did next?" "and what do you imagine they found?" "now let's return to the prince," "time passes quickly in a story"). He also smoothed out the occasional syntactic irregularities and dramatic word order characteristic of oral style, so that his tales all read as if they were carefully written, and by the same author. The reader of Calvino's versions will find little of the variation in storytellers' styles, penchant for details, and rich use of homey idioms, metaphors, exclamations, and other expressions that we have sought to preserve in our English versions or mention in our notes. We make this point not to denigrate the achievement of Calvino, who in the mid-1950s did a heroic job of assembling and translating tales from all over Italy into standard Italian so that they could be appreciated by his country's reading public; but to make clear to our own reading public how rich and multi-textured the language of this folk tradition really is. The women and men who told these stories to Pitrè and his friends and collectors were verbal artists, often of a very high caliber. We feel fortunate to be able to preserve their names for the historical record as custodians of their rich cultural heritage, along with the names of those who made the effort to collect them.

If some of our readers find family names of their ancestors, relatives or friends among the tellers and collectors of these tales—as I did—the discovery will bring home all the more forcefully the strength and tenacity of Sicilian traditions and the tough-minded people who maintained them in the Old Country and carried them into the New World.

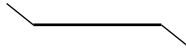
## The Meaning and Wisdom of the Tales

Pitrè's Sicilian tales, like all folk tales, represent a vision of life shared by an entire population. Life is seen as a continuing struggle to survive and get ahead, while at the same time it is a theater of entertaining fantasies and amusing incidents, as well as a repository of traditional wisdom, often deliberately couched in the form of proverbs and historical memories. These

Sicilian tales reflect the vision of most nineteenth-century Sicilians, a mixture of realistic assessments and wish-fulfilling fantasies. Life is hard and material comfort difficult to achieve and sustain, so that in the tale world success often comes to us through the fantasy of marrying a prince or princess or the lucky encounter with a magical helper. But the hard realism of the tales will not allow the fantasy of royal marriage to have the final word. "Happy endings" are usually followed by one of our "back-to-reality" formulas, like "so they lived on, happy and content, while we sit here without a cent."

Given the harshness of this real world with which we must contend, how do the tales enable us to live in it and achieve what we desire? By the exercise of our native wit, by seeking out every advantage we can get and making the most of it—that is what the protagonists of these tales do. They usually begin with little power and have to face established authorities like royalty, clergy, or the wealthy bourgeoisie. But these adversaries are presented as sufficiently foolish or arrogant that they can be vanquished by the tenacity and cleverness with which the humble folk are richly endowed. While kings may be cruel and enjoy imposing difficult tasks—as in the folk tales of other nations—here we often find kings who are easily duped by our shrewd and enterprising protagonists. Princes are often petty and weak, prone to falling lovesick over the heroine and needing to be restored by some clever ploy devised by that enterprising young woman. That other source of power and authority, the church and clergy, is usually too concerned with self-interest to give ordinary folk any significant help, although the saints often come to their rescue. People who have achieved middle-class prosperity are also shown in an unflattering light, often as objects of outright ridicule, as in "Tippiti-Nnàppiti."

The message of these Sicilian tales, then, contains a strong subversive element. Society is a hierarchical structure in which we, the folk (and we all remain folk at some basic level) must contend with authority that is habitually selfish and arbitrary. But while the deck is stacked against us, native wit and tenacity will allow us to cope successfully with those to whom society has given more power but less brains. It is impossible for us, even as modern readers from a different time and place, not to enjoy the subversive and comic energy that drives many of these tales and to identify with their resourceful protagonists. Giuseppe Pitre's achievement, then, in collecting and publishing this great cultural treasure from his own time and place has certainly exceeded his most ambitious expectations. He has given us a timeless treasure which, even today, offers us enjoyment and no small portion of wisdom.



# Popular Fairy Tales



## 1. THE TALE TOLD TIME AND AGAIN<sup>13</sup>

It's been told time and again that there was once a mother and daughter. Well, this mother had many chickens, and whenever she went to mass, she left them with her daughter. One day she said to her, "Elisabetta, Elisabetta, I'm leaving the chickens with you. See that you sweep the house and make the bed before I come back."

Elisabetta put the bed in order and swept the house, and after she picked up a little chick, she began looking for fleas and lice. One of the chicks had a note<sup>14</sup> stuck in its feathers that fell into her hand.

Now there was a merchant, and this merchant sold all sorts of stuff that made him a rich man, and he promised to give his shop to anyone who could tell him a story that began without "it's been told time and again." Many people came and tried, but they all began their tales with "it's been told time and again," and he always won the wager. Then the girl arrived with the note and said to him, "Signor merchant, I've come here to tell you a tale that will begin without 'it's been told time and again.' "

"Get out of here, you dirty brat!" he said. "How can you possibly know how to tell a tale that doesn't begin with 'it's been told time and again?' "

And then she began:

"Once there was a little note,  
And this note spoke and said:  
Get out of here, merchant, this shop is mine."

And this is how the girl became the owner of the shop, and the merchant had to leave.

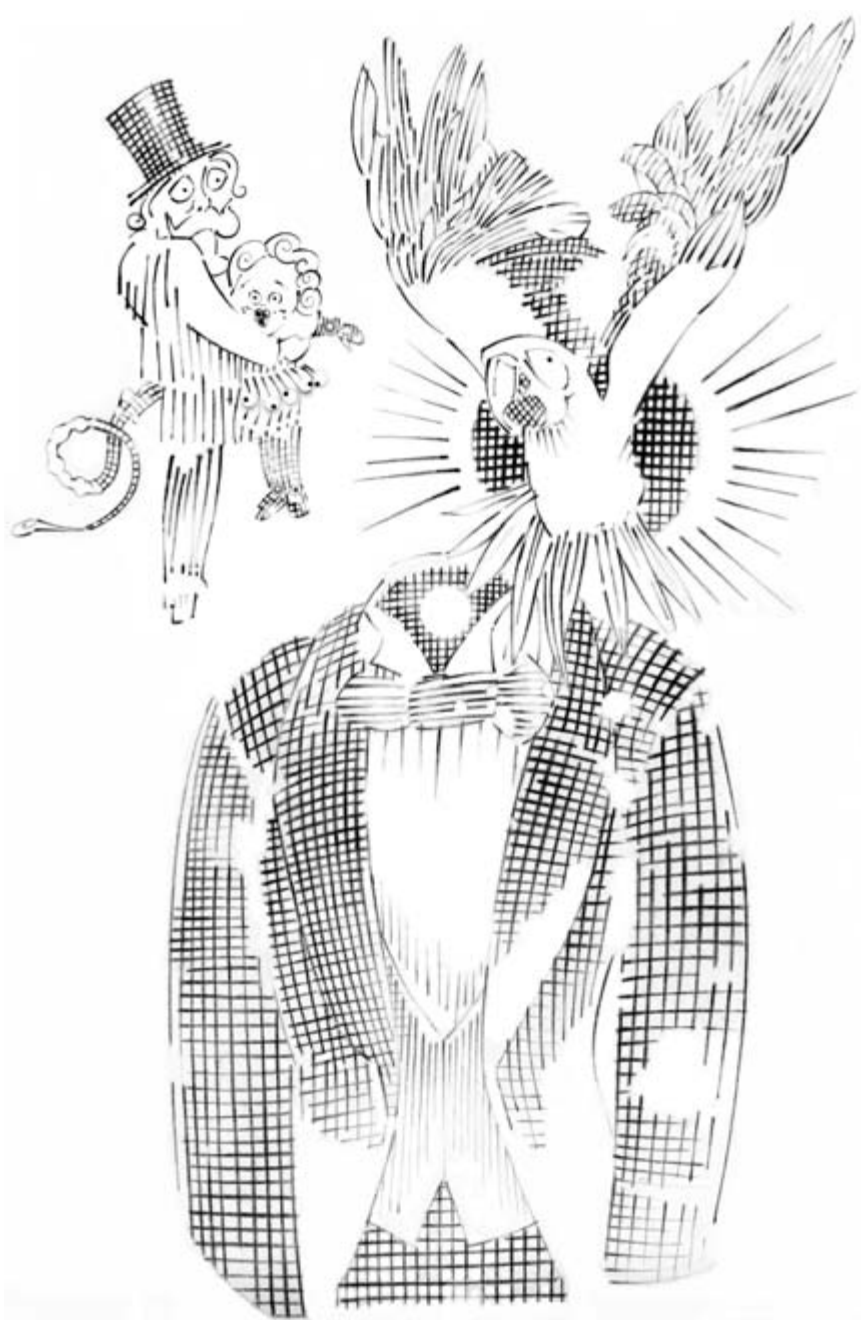
So, she remained happy and content  
While we still can't pay the rent.

And now my tale is done.

*Told by Mara (Maria) Curatolo, 8 years old, in Erice.*

13 Significantly, Pitre wrote: "I am opening the collection with this tale to show that nothing is arbitrary in folk tales. But there are certain formulas consecrated to the use of the tales that perpetuate the oral tradition."

14 The narrator uses the word *pulisedda*, which is the diminutive of *pòlisa* (Sicilian) or *polizza* (Italian). The note is more than likely a policy or deed to a house/shop. The girl takes the note or deed of the property to claim the shop. The written document appears to take precedence over the oral tradition, an interesting comment on the rise of literacy and the significance of documents in Sicily.



## 2. THE PARROT WITH THREE TALES TO TELL

**H**ere's a tale people like to tell . . .

There once was a wealthy merchant, and he wanted to marry. Well, he found himself a wife who loved him dearly, a wife as beautiful as the morning. But one day he came home looking troubled.

"What's bothering you?" his wife asked.

"I have important business that requires a long trip," he said, "and I don't like leaving you by yourself."

"Is that all? Well then, here's what you should do. Gather all the provisions I might need, and lock me inside. Have all the doors and windows nailed, except for one window high up, and then put a basket there with a wheel and pulley for me. Once you do all this, you can leave without worrying."

"That's an excellent plan," said the husband, and immediately he had her supplied with bread, flour, oil, coal, and the rest. Then he had everything nailed shut except for one window. Finally he had a pulley installed—just like in a convent—and he took his leave, while his wife stayed behind with her maid.

The next morning, the servant came and called up from the pulley to ask what she wanted him to buy, and off he went.

It went on like this for ten days, and then the woman began to feel suffocated. Indeed, she was seized by a fit of crying beyond description.

"My lady, there's a remedy for everything," her maid said to her. "Let's pull the little table under the window and climb up on it, and we'll enjoy the beautiful view of the Corso."<sup>15</sup>

So they pulled the table under the window, and the woman looked out. She heaved a big sigh, saying "Thank the Lord!"

In the house opposite hers was a notary's office, and just at that very moment the notary was there with a gentleman friend. The two men turned and saw the lovely young woman. "Oh what a beauty!" said the gentleman. "I simply must speak to her."

"No, I want to speak to her first," said the notary. And they went at it with "Me first!" and "No, me first!" until they decided to make a bet—four hundred gold pieces to the one that spoke to her first. Just then the woman noticed them and immediately withdrew so that her face was not seen again at that window.

15 The Sicilian term *Càsseru* indicates the main avenue in nineteenth-century Palermo.

The notary and the gentleman were both intent on winning the wager and went running about town, each one seeking a way to speak to the lady. Finally, the notary became desperate and went out of town and into the fields, where he called upon his demon. When the demon appeared, the notary told him the whole story and added, "And this gentleman wants to be able to boast that he spoke to her first!"

"And you, what can you offer me?" said the demon.

"My soul."

"Good. Now here's what you have to do. I'll turn you into a parrot, and you'll fly and land on the lady's window. Then the maid will take you and put you in a silver cage. Your gentlemen friend is going to hire the services of an old woman, who will be clever enough to lure the lady out of her house. Your job is to keep her from leaving, do you understand? You must say to her, 'Pretty Mamma, sit down, and I'll tell you a story.' The old woman is going to come three times. Each time, you must ruffle your feathers, flail around making a great ruckus, and say:

Mamma Mia Bella,  
Don't go with the old woman.  
She's bound to betray you.  
Sit down while I tell you a story.

And then tell her whatever story comes into your mind."

When the demon was finished, he pronounced these words: "Man you are, may you now become a parrot!"

The parrot flew off and went straight to the open window. The maid saw it, threw her handkerchief, and snared it. When the young woman saw the parrot, she said,

"How beautiful you are! Now you will be my consolation!"

"Yes, pretty Mamma, I will love you, too."

So the woman had a silver cage made, and there she kept the parrot.

Now, let's leave the parrot in his cage and return to the gentleman, who was still trying desperately to see the lady. Finally, he met an old crone who asked him what his problem was.

"Why should I tell you my problems?" he said. But the old woman persisted, and he couldn't keep from telling her the whole story.

"I can arrange for her to talk to you," she said. "First, you must get me two baskets filled with beautiful fruit, rare and out of season."

The gentleman was so intent and anxious to see the lady that he had the baskets of fruit prepared as the old woman had asked. She picked them up,

carried them to the spot where the wheel and pulley were, and pretended to be the lady's grandma. The lady believed her, and one word led to another.

"So tell me," the old woman said, "since you are always shut in, how do you hear Sunday mass?"

"How could I, shut in like this?"

"Ah, my daughter, this is a serious mistake. A person *must* hear mass on Sunday. Since today is a holiday, why don't we go to church together?"

As the young lady was being persuaded, the parrot began to lament, and when she opened her chest of drawers to dress for church, the bird sang out:

Mamma Mia Bella, please don't go.  
That old woman intends to betray you.  
Stay here with me, and I'll tell you a story.<sup>16</sup>

This plea caught the lady's fancy, and she said "Granny, you'll have to go without me. I'm staying here."

And so the old woman had to depart. When she was gone, the lady went to the parrot, and he told her the following tale.

### *First Tale of the Parrot*

Once upon a time there was a king who had an only daughter, and this daughter was very fond of dolls. She had one special favorite that she would dress and undress and put to bed. In short, she did everything you do with children. One day the king decided they would go to the countryside, and the princess took her doll with her. She set her doll down on a hedge and played so much that she became distracted. Then it was meal time, and they all went to eat. After the meal, they climbed into the royal carriage and returned to the palace. And what do you think the princess forgot? Her doll of course! She thought of it the moment they reached the palace. So what did she do? Instead of going upstairs, she turned right around and went off looking for her doll. But once outside the gates, she got lost and began wandering from village to village, as if lost in a fog.

Finally she came to a royal palace and asked who the king was.

"The King of Spain," they said.

So she asked for lodging and was admitted. The king, who was childless, treated her as if she was his daughter. Once the princess felt at home in the palace, she began acting like the mistress of the place. Indeed, the king had

16 The words here vary slightly from the "formula" given by the demon.

given her the freedom to act as she pleased and even gave her twelve royal damsels to wait on her

Now it's a well known saying that "there is always envy among equals,"<sup>17</sup> and these damsels began to talk against her.

"Look at this girl," they said, "we don't even know who she is, and yet she's become our princess! It's time we put an end to this!"

So the next day they said to her, "Would you like to come with us?"

"Not without papa's permission," she answered.

"Well, here's how to get his permission. Just say, 'By the soul of your daughter, allow me to go!' The second he hears these words, he'll allow you to go."

So the princess did just this. But when the king heard her say, "By the soul of your daughter," he cried, "Ah you wicked thing, you! Throw her down the trap-door!"

When the princess was thrown down the trap-door, she found a doorway, then another and another, always groping her way. At a certain point, feeling her way like a blind person, she found tinder and matches. Using the tinder to light a candle that she had discovered there, she saw a beautiful young girl with a padlock over her mouth that kept her from speaking. But she managed to indicate with gestures that the key to open the padlock was under the pillow of the bed. The princess found it and unlocked the padlock. As soon as the girl could talk, she told her that she was the king's daughter, but a wizard had kidnapped her. At midnight every day the wizard brought her food, but then he locked up her mouth, and she had to wait until the next day to have it opened again.

"Tell me, isn't there any way to free you?" asked the princess.

"I have no idea. But I can try asking the wizard when he comes to open my mouth. Why don't you hide under the bed and listen, and then we might figure something out."

"Good! Good!"

So the princess locked up her mouth again, put the key back under the pillow, and hid under the bed. When midnight came, there was a great commotion: the earth shook, there were lightning flashes, smoke, the stench of sulfur—and the wizard appeared, wrapped in a sorcerer's cloak. He was accompanied by a giant with a platter of food and two servants with torches to light his way. After the wizard sent the servants away, he locked the door,

17 A familiar proverb, lit. "envy is amongst peers," *la 'mmidia è 'nta li pari*. Pitre's *Proverbi Siciliani*, v. 2, cites versions from many other regions and dialects of Italy, and the apparent source, the Latin *invidia inter pares*.

took the key, and opened the mouth of the king's daughter. While they were eating, she said to him "Wizard, I've been thinking and have become curious—what would it take for me to get out of here?"

"You want to know a great deal, my girl."

"Never mind. I don't really need to know."

"Oh no, I don't mind telling you. It would require, first, laying a mine all around the palace. Then on the dot of midnight, just as I'm about to enter, someone would have to ignite it. There would be a terrific explosion, and I would go flying through the air. All at once you would find yourself back with your father."

"You certainly can trust me with your secret," said the king's daughter.

After the wizard put on his cloak and departed, the princess waited a little while before she came out from under the bed. Then she said goodbye to her little sister—she was already calling her that—and off she went.

She continued walking underground until she came to the trap-door where she stopped and called for help. The king heard her and had a rope lowered for her to climb up. Once in the king's presence, she told him everything. He was amazed and immediately ordered his men to lay down the mine and fill it with gunpowder, cannonballs, and grapeshot. When it was packed as full as could be, the princess took a cloak and went back to find the girl.

"We're in this together, dead or alive!" she told her.

Then she took the little padlock off her mouth, and after they made their plans, she got under the bed again without leaving a trace behind her. The hour came, the wizard arrived, and the king was waiting with a watch in his hands. At the stroke of midnight he ignited the mine and *Boom!*—there was a tremendous blast. The wizard was blown to smithereens, and the two girls were in each other's arms, both free.

When the king saw them, he cried out, "Oh, my children! My daughter, your misfortune was your good fortune! And you," he said to the girl he had adopted, "you will have my crown."

"No need, my lord. I have my own crown, because I, too, am the daughter of a king."

News of this event spread the whole world over. As the people in different kingdoms heard about it, everyone had nothing but praise for the great courage and goodness of the princess who freed the other princess from the wizard. And they remained happy and enjoyed blessed peace for ever after.

"Well, pretty Mamma, what did you think of my story?"

"It was beautiful," said the lady to the parrot.

A week passed after the parrot had told the story, and the old woman came again to visit her “granddaughter,” carrying two more baskets of fruit.

“Oh-oh!” said the parrot. “You’d better watch yourself, pretty Mamma, because that old woman is here again.”

The old woman asked again, “Will you come with me to mass?”

“Yes, Granny,” said the lady, and she began dressing.

When the parrot saw this, he made a big ruckus, tearing off his feathers and weeping.

“No, pretty Mama, don’t go to mass, that old woman will be the ruin of you! Stay here with me, and I’ll tell you another story.”

“You’d better leave,” said the lady to the old woman. “I can’t let my dear little parrot die just for a mass!”

“Oh you wicked woman! For the sake of a mere bird, you’re ready to lose your soul!”

But the old woman had to leave. Meanwhile, the lady stayed with the parrot, and he told her the following tale.

### *Second Tale of the Parrot*

Once upon a time, my lady, there was a king with an only child, a daughter as beautiful as the sun and the moon. When she reached the age of eighteen and was ready for marriage, her first suitor was a Turkish king. When she learned who he was, she showed her contempt by saying, “I want nothing to do with Turks!”<sup>18</sup>

A short time passed, and she was overcome by a terrible illness. The doctors could offer no explanation. She had convulsions, and her body became twisted like a coil. Her eyes rolled almost to the back of her head, and no one could diagnose her malady. Her poor, confused father summoned his council.

“My councilors,” he said, “my poor daughter is losing ground every day. What advice can you give me?”

“Your Majesty,” the wise men replied, “have you heard about the maiden who rescued the King of Spain’s lost daughter? If you can find her, she can tell you what your daughter needs.”

“Excellent!” he said. “This is perfect advice.”

So the king ordered ships to go and bring this maiden to him. “And if the

18 Throughout all the Sicilian tales, the Turks and Moors tend to be represented in a negative light. There were many prejudices especially against the Turks in Sicily during the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries.

King of Spain doesn't want to release her, give him this iron gauntlet as a declaration of war!"

The king's vessels left, and one fine morning they arrived in Spain. They fired a great salvo, and when the ambassador disembarked, he met the king and handed him a sealed letter. The king opened it, read it, and began to weep. "Since I refuse to give up my daughter, I have no choice but to go to war."

Just at this moment his daughter happened to enter the room.

"What's wrong, your Majesty?" she asked, and once she read the letter, she said, "Why are you so scared? Let me go and visit this king."

"What? How can you leave me, daughter?"

"Don't worry. I'll just go and see what's wrong with this maiden, and soon I'll be back."

Then she went to say good-bye to her sister and departed. When she arrived in the other country, the king came to meet her.

"Young lady, if you can cure this sick daughter of mine, I'll give you my crown."

"Here's another king offering me a crown!" she thought to herself. But what she said aloud was, "My Lord, I already have a crown of my own. Let us address the problem at hand and not speak of crowns."

When they showed her the princess, and she saw how wasted and wan she looked, she said to the king, "Your Majesty, I will need to have all kinds of broth and hearty dishes brought here."

Once they arrived, she said, "Now I'm going to lock myself in with your daughter, and there will be no need for you to open because, after three days, either I'll give her back to you alive, or you'll find her dead. And you must heed these words of mine: even if I knock for you, *you are not to open*."

Everything was prepared, and she locked herself in with iron bars and chains. But what did she forget? She forgot tinder for lighting the night candle! So, that night she had a problem because she knew she couldn't knock to ask for anything. As she looked out of the room's large window, she saw a light far away. So she took a silken ladder and climbed down with a candle, thinking she could get it lit. When she reached the light, she discovered a giant cauldron set on large stones with a kiln underneath and a Turk, who was stirring with a metal rod.

"What are you doing, Turk?"

"My king, he want daughter of king. She not want him. Do enchantment."<sup>19</sup>

19 Pitre notes the Sicilian stereotyping of Turks and other foreigners. They are caricatured by their ungrammatical speech—in this tale, by the use of infinitive verb forms in place of properly inflected ones.

"Oh, my poor little Turkie, you must be so tired by now. Why don't you just take a short rest, and leave the stirring to me?"

"Yes, by Mohammed."

So he got down and she got up and began stirring with the rod. "Am I doing it right this way?"

"By Mohammed, yes!"

"All right then, you sleep, and I'll do the stirring."

After he was asleep, she climbed down, grabbed him, and dumped him in the boiling cauldron. Poor fellow, he was done for! When she saw he was dead, she lit the candle, returned to the palace, and entered the room. She found the sick girl on the floor, lost to the world. But when she gave her scented water, the girl regained consciousness. After three days she was completely recovered. Then she knocked for the king, and he was astonished to find his daughter well again.

"Ah, young lady," he said to the princess, "how can I ever repay you? Won't you stay here with me?"

"I'm sorry, but that's impossible. You threatened my father with war if he didn't allow me to come. Now my father will threaten you with the same if you don't send me back to him."

So she stayed for some two weeks, and when she finally departed, the king showered her with riches and jewels. And that's how she returned to the palace of the King of Spain.

And so the tale is done.

"How did you like this story, pretty Mamma?" asked the parrot.

"Oh, it was perfectly lovely."

"But you must remember never to go with that old woman because she is nothing but a deceiver."

Well, a week went by and—*whoosh!* can you believe it?!—there was the old woman again with her baskets of fruit.

"Daughter of mine, today I must insist on this favor! You must come with me to hear holy mass."

"All right, I'll come."

When the parrot heard this, he began crying and tearing out his feathers.

"No, pretty Mamma, don't go with the old woman! If you stay, I'll tell you another story."

"Granny of mine," she said, "It's time you stopped coming here. I'm not willing to lose this parrot just because of you."

So she turned the wheel and shut the window, and the old woman went off

muttering and cursing. Meanwhile, the lady sat down next to the parrot, and the parrot told her the following tale.

### *Third Tale of the Parrot*

Once upon a time there was a king and a queen, and they had an only son whose greatest pastime was hunting. One day he decided to go hunting for a whole month in a faraway place, and he took all his entourage with him. After much traveling, where do you think they landed? They arrived at the very spot where the princess had left her doll. Well, when the prince saw that doll, he said, "I've found my quarry! Let's go home!"

He picked up the doll and placed her directly in front of him on his horse. And the whole journey long he kept saying, "If the doll is so beautiful, imagine the maiden who owns her! If the doll is so beautiful, imagine the maiden who owns her!"

When he came to his palace, what did he do? He went right to his room and had an opening made in the wall to serve as a window-niche for the doll. Then he just gazed upon her all around the clock, twenty-four hours a day, repeating to himself, "If the doll is so beautiful, imagine the owner!"

Finally this young man lost all interest in seeing anyone but the doll. He was overcome by such melancholy that his father had to summon a group of doctors. When the doctors came, they looked at him and said, "Your Majesty, we don't have the faintest idea what this illness could be, but it's evident that he's obsessed with this doll."

The king went to see his son, but all the young man could do was to gaze at the doll and repeat, "If the doll is so beautiful, imagine the maiden who owns her!" So the doctors came and went, and the prince, gulping painful breaths and sighs, just kept repeating, "If the doll is so beautiful, imagine the maiden who owns her!"

By now the king was really at his wits' end. He rang the bell summoning his Grand Council, and cried out,

"Do you see what a sorry state my son is in? He has no fever, no headaches, but he is wasting away day by day, and my kingdom will be left for someone else to enjoy. I need your advice!"

"Your Majesty, why are you so worried? Don't you remember that girl, the one who rescued the King of Spain's daughter and then went on to cure another princess? Send for this maiden at once—and if her father won't release her, threaten him with war."

So the king ordered his ambassadors to deliver this threatening message: "You must send us your daughter, otherwise there will be war." But just as the

ambassadors had conveyed the message, the princess herself entered the room, and when she saw the king at a loss, she asked him, "What's troubling you?"

"Nothing, my child. It's just that another envoy has arrived, and now another king wants you. It seems that I can no longer have you at my beck and call."

"There's no problem in sending me, your Majesty. I'll be back before you know it."

So the princess embarked with her entourage, came to this new kingdom, and went to see the prince. She found him swallowing sigh after sigh and repeating, "Oh! If the doll is so beautiful, imagine the maiden who owns her!"

"Well, you called me just in the nick of time," she said to the king. "Give me one week, and have unguents and food brought to me each day, and after a week you'll find him either alive and well, or dead and gone."

Once she was locked in with the prince, she paid close attention to what he was saying. At first she could not understand his words because he was so feeble and on the brink of death. But when she finally heard what he was murmuring and saw the doll, she burst out, "Oh, you scoundrel! You're the one who stole my doll! I'll see that you get what you deserve!"

When the prince heard these words, he revived and said, "Are you the doll's mistress?"

"Yes, it's me!"

Well, you can imagine how that prince came back to life. She began feeding him broth and soon had him fully restored to life. When he was feeling better, she asked, "Now tell me how you got this doll?" and the prince told her the whole story. In less than a week the prince was himself again, and soon it was announced that he and the maiden would wed.

The king, beside himself with joy at his son's recovery, began writing letters. The first one was to the King of Spain, telling him that the girl finally found her doll; the second was to the king who was her father, telling him that his daughter had been found; and the third was to the king whose daughter she had made well again. Then all of these monarchs came together and held festivities on a grand scale, and the prince took the princess as his wife, and they lived in blessed peace."

"Did you enjoy this story, pretty Mamma?"

"Oh yes, very much."

"Good. But don't forget, you must never go with the old woman."

After the third tale was done, the servant came and announced: "My lady, my lady, the master has returned!"

“Really?” said the lady. “Well then, listen, my parrot, I’m going to have a new cage made for you.”

The master arrived, opened all the windows, and embraced his wife. Dinner time came, and they placed the parrot in the middle of the table. At the high point of the meal, the parrot sprayed some soup right into the master’s eyes. When the master reached up and covered his burning eyes with his hands, the parrot seized him by the throat, strangled him, and flew away.

Once the bird reached a valley, it landed on the ground and said, “Parrot I am, and man I shall become!” All at once the bird turned back into the notary he was, all neatly combed and dressed, and went walking along the Corso, where he met the gentleman, who had made the bet with him.

“Did you hear the news?” the gentleman asked. “That poor lady’s husband is dead. A parrot strangled him!”

“Really? Poor, poor thing!” said the notary, and they went their separate ways with no mention of their wager.

The notary learned that the lady had a mother, and so he went to her and asked for her daughter’s hand in marriage. There was maybe yes and maybe no, and some hemming and hawing, but in the end the mother said yes. So the notary and the woman were married.

That night, the notary asked the lady, “Now tell me, who killed your husband?”

“A parrot.”

“And what about this parrot? Tell me the whole story.”

And so the woman told him the whole story up to the point where the parrot sprayed the hot soup into the master’s eyes and flew away.

“That’s exactly right!” said the notary. “Because that parrot was none other than myself!”

“You? I can’t believe it!”

“Yes it was me, and it was all for your sake that I had myself turned into a parrot!”

The next morning the notary went to visit the gentleman and collected his four hundred gold pieces, and he enjoyed them together with his wife.

They remained happy living in peace,

While we sit here still picking our teeth.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina at Palermo.*

### 3. THE KING OF SPAIN'S DAUGHTERS

Gentlemen, let me tell you a tale that's been told time and again about a king of Spain, who had two daughters. One of them had been carried off by the fairies, and the other was still with him in his palace. The daughter who was still with him had a doll, which resembled the princess down to the last hair. This is why she liked to dress the doll in her own clothing and place this pretty creature in her big window that looked out on the city garden.

Well, one day the son of the King of Portugal happened to go into the garden, and when he saw this dazzling beauty, he became totally enthralled. But then he looked more closely and noticed that she had a tiny crack in her forehead, and that she was really just a doll. So what did he do? He went and got a ladder, set it against the wall, climbed up to the window, and took the doll home to his own palace. He locked himself in his room, lit some candles, and was constantly on his knees revering this doll night and day. As for food, he simply had the servants slip it through a crack in the door.

Now let's leave the prince and return to the King of Spain's daughter. When she came in the evening to get her doll, she found it missing and burst into tears. She pounded her chest, tore her hair, and made such a huge uproar that her father came and asked, "What's the matter?"

"What's the matter? The matter is that someone came and stole my doll from the window!"

Hearing this, the king announced that a reward of a thousand gold coins would be granted to whoever could find the doll. But not a single person appeared to collect the reward. The princess, in her despair, decided to leave the palace. After she went away, she ended up finding work as a servant in the household of the King of Portugal.

One day, as she happened to be bringing the king's son his meal, she looked through the door and saw that her doll was right there inside the prince's room. Poor girl! Her blood froze in her veins at the sight of it. So what did she do? She forced open the door, seized the doll, and ran off quick as lightning back to her father's palace. But her father did not recognize her any longer because smoke had blackened her face. So he gave her a job as his doorkeeper.

Now in the king's garden there was a fountain, and one side had a broken bottom that provided space for a dark underground chamber. It was the custom for all the poor people to come to the king and beg for alms, which irritated him. So he told his doorkeeper that if she allowed one more poor person to enter, he would have her thrown down into the fountain's deep

chamber. But she paid no attention to this and continued to let the poor people in. Finally, the king carried out his threat and had her thrown into that dark chamber.

Once she was there, she began looking around and saw a little hole. She dug at it until it turned into a great big hole, big enough to enter. When she walked through it, she came into a room where she saw two cooked doves, piping hot, sitting on a cabinet. She took them and ate them. The next day she found two more and did the same. The third day she grew curious about who was bringing these doves, so she made her way into the adjacent room, but she didn't see anybody. She went into a third room, and there she saw—you can't imagine it!—she saw a lovely woman, beautiful as the sun, and all in chains.

"How did you get here?" asked the woman. "Who brought you?"

So the princess recounted her entire story from beginning to end.

"Do you realize," said the woman, "that you are my sister? I am the daughter of the King of Spain."

Well, you would have loved to have seen it, the two of them embracing, kissing one another, and crying out of sheer joy! When they finished, the sister in chains said, "It's the fairies that have me in their power. You must go to our father and tell him that if he wants to free me, he has to have eight matrons with flowers and powerful incense, and ten men of marvelous strength, each strong enough to hold and swing a hundred-pound hammer to crack the skulls of whomever I say."

They hugged and kissed again, and the sister who had been punished by the king went back to her underground chamber. When the servants came to bring her food, she insisted she had to speak to the king. He agreed, and when the two of them were alone, she proposed that, if he promised to grant her freedom, she would bring back his daughter who had been taken by the fairies, as well as his other daughter who had run away. The king could hardly believe he was hearing such a promise. Not only would he grant her freedom, he replied, he would also give her whatever else she wanted. She answered that she needed eight matrons with flowers and powerful incense, and ten men of marvelous strength, each strong enough to hold and swing a hundred-pound hammer. The king ordered all of this to be prepared without the slightest delay.

While these preparations were being made, the King of Portugal's son, who had been vexed when he found out that the doll had been taken from him, arrived in Spain and went directly to the royal court.

Meanwhile, the king's daughter had the eight matrons and ten powerful men come down to her room beneath the fountain, and this is what she did: she took the matrons with their canisters of flowers and incense that smelled

so sweet as to seem paradisiacal and placed them in front. Behind them, she arranged the men who had their hammers ready at hand. The fairies, smelling the lovely aroma, lost their senses, and at that very moment the strong men swung the hammers and cracked their skulls. Once the king's imprisoned daughter was set free, they took her out of that dark underground place and brought her to her father the king.

You can't imagine what a celebration the king held! At the height of the festivities, he sent for the doorkeeper again and said to her,

"Now I want you to find my other daughter for me."

"You are talking to the very daughter you are seeking," she answered.

At last the king recognized her and began hugging and kissing her. Now the celebration grew and grew, and when the festivities were at their height, the prince of Portugal entered and asked, "Princess, aren't you the one who owned the doll, the one I stole?"

"Yes," she answered.


Then he turned to the King of Spain and said, "Your Majesty, I am the son of the King of Portugal, and I'm in love with your daughter. Therefore I am asking for her hand in marriage."

"You have my consent," replied the king. And thus they were married.

So they remained, content and at peace,  
While we just sit here, picking our teeth.

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

#### 4. PRETTY POOR-GIRL, OR POVIRA-BEDDA

nce upon a time, so the story goes, there was an old woman with a beautiful granddaughter. They were so poor that their survival depended on whatever people were willing to give them. The girl was called Povira-bedda, "Pretty Poor-Girl."

One day a fortune-teller came along, one of those charlatans, who travels around offering to tell the fortune of any woman who'd believe him, just to make some money. He was so insistent that Povira-bedda agreed to have her fortune told. The poor child had no money to give him, but he had noticed a little bed quilt spread out in the sun outside the house, and he agreed to take this as payment.

He began making the usual sign of the cross in the girl's palm, and then he predicted that she would get a king for a husband. Povira-bedda's first

reaction was to laugh, but the idea stayed in her head, and she began to think about it.

Well, it so happened that Povira-bedda's house stood just below the king's palace. At the very moment the fortune-teller was reciting her future, the young prince happened to be looking out and listening. He was very amused, and as he laughed, he called out to her:

“You lost the little quilt from your bed,  
But a prince like me you'll never wed!”

Povira-bedda answered him:

“Why should I worry?  
There's one that's above and one that's below,  
And I'll be the prince's wife, I know;  
And as I trust in the Lord divine,  
The son of the king is sure to be mine.  
As I trust in God and the saints alone,  
The prince will soon be my very own.”

The prince chuckled at hearing this, but inside him a little love wound had opened and would never heal.

Now let's turn to the old woman, who came back home and found her little quilt missing. She uttered such a howl and tore her hair so much that the prince had one of his own quilts sent over to appease her. But then, as the days passed, the prince found that he couldn't take his mind off Povira-bedda and thought of ways how he might keep teasing her and reciting the same taunt. Deep in his heart, the flame of his love for her was burning more brightly every day.

The prince's mother, the queen, was fully aware of what was happening to her son. So she made the shrewd decision to ease his soul by having him marry. When she suggested this, he answered that he would marry only when she brought him a young woman who was the exact image of Povira-bedda. Upon hearing this, the queen felt like someone caught in a thorn-bush, but she quickly thought of a way to disentangle herself, and came up with the following plan.

She arranged to marry her son to a certain princess and had her brought to the palace. Then she summoned the old grandmother and told her that she wanted Povira-bedda to come and be her son's bride, in place of the intended spouse, since he insisted that he would only marry a girl who was the exact image of Povira-bedda.

When the old woman told this to her granddaughter, the girl didn't need any persuading! The following evening Povira-bedda, all dressed up as you can imagine, presented herself to the prince. At the sight of her he was at a loss for words, and he married her on the spot. But Povira-bedda did not dare get into the marriage-bed. The queen, you see, had ordered her to hide underneath the bed, so that the bride that she had selected for her son could lie in the bed. The prince, of course, did not understand what was happening. In the wink of an eye Povira-bedda vanished under the bed and—zoom!—in between the bed-sheets slipped the princess.

Well, as the proverb says about such tricks, "The devil creates them, and the devil exposes them." When the prince realized what had been done to him, he became enraged.

"I've been tricked! I've been betrayed!" he kept shouting, until all the palace servants came running.

Now the queen had to admit that her plan had completely backfired, and she had no choice but to give her blessing to the marriage. And that's the way Povira-bedda got the king's son as her very own.

*Collected by Mattia Di Martino from an anonymous storyteller at Noto.*

## 5. THE POT OF BASIL

Once upon a time there was a father who had a daughter called Rusidda. Since there was no one at home to educate her, he sent her to live at school with a teacher. Now this teacher had a terrace that faced the king's residence, and the king had a son who frequently looked out from his own terrace. One day Rusidda was looking out and singing a song that went: *Ton to ron tò, The things that I know.*<sup>20</sup> The king's son was there, and he called out to her:

"Rusidda, Rusidda, how much do you know?  
How many leaves does the basil plant show?"

Rusidda, not knowing how to answer, went to ask her teacher.

"What's the problem?" asked the teacher,  
and Rusidda answered, "The king's son said to me:

<sup>20</sup> The original consists purely of the nonsense syllables "*ton to ron to, ton to ron to.*" We have added "The things that I know" to prepare for the prince's response.

Rusidda, Rusidda, how much do you know?  
How many leaves does the basil plant show?"

"If he asks you again," said the teacher, "say to him:

And you, with your royal crown of gold,  
How many stars does the dark sky hold?"

The next morning Rusidda went again to look out from the terrace. The king's son came out and said:

"Rusidda, Rusidda, how much do you know?  
How many leaves does the basil plant show?"

And she answered:

"And you, with your royal crown of gold,  
How many stars does the dark sky hold?"

Now it was the young prince who was unable to respond. He was filled with resentment and vowed to get back at her. So he went and made a deal with her teacher.

"Allow me to spend one night under Rusidda's bed, and I'll give you a fine gift in return."

The teacher agreed. When the hour came, and Rusidda went to bed, the prince took a pointed tool and kept poking her through the mattress. The next morning, Rusidda was miserable. Her teacher noticed and asked, "Rusidda, what happened to you?"

"Oh teacher, what terrible fleas, what terrible bed bugs!"

The next morning there was another confrontation: Rusidda went to the same terrace, and the two of them began taunting each other:

"Rusidda, Rusidda, how much do you know?  
How many leaves does the basil plant show?"

"And you, with your royal crown of gold,  
How many stars does the dark sky hold?"

"Rusidda, what keeps you from sleeping at night?  
Oh teacher, these bed bugs and fleas can bite!"

Rusidda went to her teacher and said, "Teacher, you've betrayed me!" and then she left.

When she returned home to her father, he asked why she didn't want to stay with the teacher any longer.

"It's all because this young prince keeps pestering me. The minute I appear on the terrace he says to me: 'Rusidda, Rusidda, how much do you know? How many leaves does the basil plant show?' and I answer him: 'And you, with your royal crown of gold, how many stars does the dark sky hold?' Last night I slept at my teacher's house, and all night long I was tossing and turning, imagining there were bed bugs and fleas. But it turned out to be the prince who was poking me."

"Calm down, my daughter," said her father, "and let me figure out what to do next."

The father went and bought the best horse there was, and then he had a belt made entirely of gold.

"Take this belt," he said. "Mount the horse, and tomorrow go riding under the king's palace."

So the next morning Rusidda did this, and as she rode beneath the palace with the belt in her hand, she cried out:

"To whoever kisses my horse's behind,  
I'll give this belt of gold so fine."

The prince called out to her, "If you bring it here, I'll kiss it myself," and he kissed the horse's behind. But Rusidda gave the beast a sharp goad with the spur, and the creature took off, leaving the prince standing there having kissed the horse's rear end. Meanwhile, Rusidda still held the belt in her hand and called out:

"My horse's behind you kissed and smelt,  
But you didn't get the golden belt!"

And she rode away.

The next morning Rusidda went back to her teacher, who asked, "Rusidda, are you here again?"

"Yes, Ma'am, my father insists that I come."

Rusidda went out on the terrace again, and the prince also came out.

"Ah, Rusidda, my little rose,<sup>21</sup> it's been a while since we've seen each other."

"I haven't been able to come, I've been terribly busy."

"Do you know what I have to say to you?" said the prince.

"Rusidda, Rusidda, how much do you know?  
How many leaves does the basil plant show?"

21 The prince is punning playfully on her name here, since Rusidda means "little rose."

“And you, with your royal crown of gold,  
How many stars does the dark sky hold?”

“Rusidda, what keeps you from sleeping at night?  
O teacher, these bedbugs and fleas can bite!”

“My horse’s behind you kissed and smelt,  
But you didn’t get the golden belt!”

The prince became angry all over again.

“All right, I’ll get back at you for this, you’ll see!”

The next morning he dressed up like a sailor, picked up a basket of fish, and went hawking the fish through the streets of the town: “I’ve got fish, fresh fish for sale!”

“O teacher, please buy me some fish!” Russida cried out.

“How much do you want for them?” the teacher asked him.

“I don’t sell fish for money. I sell them for kisses,” he replied.

“Are you telling me the truth? I’ve never heard of fish being sold for kisses before. How strange!”

“Yes, I’m telling you the truth.

If you’ll just give me a lovely kiss,  
I’ll give you back a lovely fish.”

The teacher told this to Rusidda, who foolishly was taken in and went and gave him a kiss. But the prince ran off, taking all his fish with him. As soon as he was home, he took off his sailor’s clothes, went out on his terrace, and resumed the exchange.

“Rusidda, Rusidda, how much do you know?  
How many leaves does the basil plant show?”

“And you, with your royal crown of gold,  
How many stars does the dark sky hold?”

“Rusidda, what keeps you from sleeping at night?  
O teacher, these bedbugs and fleas can bite!”

“My horse’s behind you kissed and smelt,  
But you didn’t get the golden belt!”

“But I got you to give me that little kiss,  
And you didn’t taste one morsel of fish!”

“I’ll make you pay for this,” said Rusidda, who went straight to her father

and told him the whole story. "My daughter, the only way we can put an end to this is to stop sending you to that teacher." And he did just that.

Now the prince went a long time without seeing Rusidda. As a consequence, he fell seriously ill, and his father became concerned.

"My son," he said, "tell me what's wrong. What are you suffering from?"

"I'm sick and feel terrible. Call all the doctors."

And so a whole medical staff was gathered. But the prince's condition kept growing worse the longer he was unable to see Rusidda.

Now Rusidda dressed herself up like a foreign doctor and entered the palace, where she met a servant. "Take this message to the king," she said. "A doctor has come from abroad, who can make his son well again."<sup>22</sup>

The king at once invited her in,  
Hoping his son could be well again.  
He invited her into the royal chamber.  
"Your Majesty, before I look at this case,  
There is one thing I must warn you about:  
No need to come running, if you hear a shout.  
For this is a sign that the cure is beginning.  
You must shut me inside the room with your son,  
And leave me to work on him in the dark."

Eager to have his son well again,  
The king then granted her every wish.  
Into the room with the son she went,  
And in a loud voice began to shout:  
"Death is coming on her crooked haunches,  
She's come to claim the son of the king."<sup>23</sup>

When Rusidda came out, the king asked this "doctor" to explain what had happened.

"No problem, your highness, your son is cured. He simply needs to be placed on the terrace first thing tomorrow morning. He told me that his illness is a desire for a young woman called Rusidda. So I will go to her and

22 In this remarkable sequence the narration becomes rhythmic and then turns into formal rhymed couplets, with all verses ending in an infinitive verb form except the next to last. (We have translated without the rhyme.) Pitre explains that, while transcribing the recitation, he became aware that it was verse not prose, and so he printed it accordingly.

23 Pitre's note says we are to understand that it is Death herself that speaks this couplet, referring to herself in the third person, as is common in some children's folksongs. Death is most commonly seen as a woman in Sicily.

her teacher and arrange for her to appear on the teacher's terrace. Then the prince will be well again."

"Doctor, I'll have everything done exactly as you say," answered the king. "For love of my son, I wouldn't know what else to do."

The next morning Rusidda went to her teacher.

"Rusidda, what brings you here?"

"I've come for some pleasant distraction. It's been so long since I was out on your terrace, and I'd love to take a little air there."

Meanwhile the king's first thought was to bring his son to the terrace that very morning. When Rusidda looked out, the king's son was already there. He began sighing and said,

"Rusidda, Rusidda, how much do you know?  
How many leaves does the basil plant show?"

"Even though you're practically dead, you still want to play games?" said Rusidda. (But she continued:)

"And you, with your royal crown of gold,  
How many stars does the dark sky hold?"

"Rusidda, what keeps you from sleeping at night?  
O teacher, these bedbugs and fleas can bite!"

"My horse's behind you kissed and smelt,  
But you didn't get the golden belt!"

"But I got you to give me a little kiss,  
And you didn't taste one morsel of fish!"

"Death is coming on her crooked haunches,  
She's come to claim the son of the king."<sup>24</sup>

Upon hearing this, the king ordered his men not to let Rusidda get away from the house and to bring her to the palace.

"You owe me an explanation! What is this all about?"

"Your Majesty, because I have no mother I was sent to a teacher. When I went out on her terrace, your son the prince made fun of me (and here she told him everything that had taken place)—so that I now ask your Majesty's permission to allow me to return to my house."

24 In this context, the reappearance of these verses serves two purposes: they inform the prince that he has once more been "one-upped" by the ingenious Rusidda, and they reveal to the king what has been happening.

"What do you mean, 'return to your house,' when your mischief has almost cost me the life of my son?!"

"Nevertheless, I want to go home!" And she made such a fuss that the king had no choice but to let her go.

Now the prince declared that he had to have this woman as his wife. And so the king and the queen, even though they were royalty, decided to pay a visit to the girl's father and ask for her hand in marriage.

"Yes, I'll give my daughter in marriage, but I must have a forty days' waiting period."

Rusidda had a sack of flour brought, a large jug of honey, and a carafe, and she shaped these materials into a puppet doll that was her own size. When the nuptial night arrived, and she was about to get into bed with the prince, she said, "I'm a little embarrassed to undress in front of you. So won't you please go into the other room a minute, while I take off my clothes and get into bed?"

After the prince went out, she set up the doll in her place in bed, took the puppet strings in her hands, and hid under the bed. When her husband came back, he asked "Rusidda, do you recall when I said to you:

Rusidda, Rusidda, how much do you know?  
How many leaves does the basil plant show?"

And the puppet nodded her head. "Do you remember when I came and sold you fish in exchange for kisses?" And the puppet nodded her head. He continued reciting a whole list of questions, and at the end he asked her: "And are you sorry now for all that you did to me?"

Here the puppet raised its head, signaling "No."

When the prince saw this, he drew his sword and shoved it into the doll's neck. The blow broke the carafe that was at the neck, and the honey began flowing out. In his rage the prince licked his sword. "Oh how sweet is this blood of my wife! Oh please, somebody, stop me, because I feel like killing myself for having lost such a sweet wife!"

As soon as he said this, Rusidda came out from under the bed shouting, "I'm alive! I'm alive!"

And Rusidda and the prince embraced one another.

And what became of the puppet so sweet?

The couple ate it as their wedding treat.

*Told by a daughter of Giuseppa Furia at Ficarazzi.*

## 6. CATARINA THE WISE

**W**ell, gentlemen, here's a tale that people have told time and again. In Palermo there was once a great merchant, who was married and had a remarkable daughter. From the moment she was weaned, she was so wise that she had a comment to make about anything that happened in the house. Because of this talent, her father called her "Catarina the Wise." She grew up studying all sorts of languages, reading all sorts of books, and displaying abilities and talents unmatched by anyone.

When the maiden turned sixteen, her mother died. In her grief, Catarina locked herself in her room and refused to come out. She decided to eat and to sleep in her room and gave up taking walks, going to the theater, or having any other diversions. Her father was very unhappy that his only daughter kept herself from having any pleasure in life. So he decided to summon a council. He called together all the leading men of the city. Indeed, as a merchant, he naturally knew all the best people.

"Gentlemen, you know very well that I have a daughter who is the apple of my eye. But ever since her mother died, she keeps herself shut in like a cat and won't even stick her nose out the door."

The councilors replied, "Your daughter is famous throughout the entire world for her exceptional wisdom. Why don't you open a great college? Perhaps by teaching young people, your daughter will be able to shed this burden from her mind."

"What a good idea!" the father exclaimed.

So he called Catarina and said, "Listen, my child. Since you've been unable to find anything to interest you, I had this idea of opening a college and placing you in charge of it. Do you like this plan?"

She liked it very much and took charge herself of organizing all the teachers for such a college. The girl had brains to spare! When the college was all set up, they put up a sign: *Free Schooling for Whoever Wants to Study with Catarina the Wise.*

So, children began coming to the school, both boys and girls, and Catarina had them sit on benches alongside one other with no distinction of rank between them. Someone objected and cried out, "he's the son of a coal merchant!" But it made no difference: the son of the coal merchant had to sit next to the daughter of the prince. As the proverb says, "First come, first served."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> We are using a familiar English proverb to translate the Sicilian, more concretely rooted in agrarian culture: "Who arrives first, gets to grind at the mill" (*Cu' veni prima macina lu mulinu*).

And that's how this school began. Catarina taught everyone equally, and whoever didn't do their assignments got a lick of the cat-o'-nine-tails.

The school's reputation spread as far as the palace, so that even the prince wanted to attend. He put on his most regal outfit and went and found a seat. When it was his turn, Catarina asked him a difficult question, and he didn't know the answer. Whack! She gave him such a hard smack that I think his cheek must still be burning. The prince returned to the palace very upset and went straight to his father.

"May it please your Majesty, I want to get married, and the one I want is Catarina the Wise."

So the king sent for Catarina's father, and he came.

"Majesty, I am at your service."

"You may rise, and you might as well know that my son is infatuated with your daughter. So, I think we should let them get married."

"As your Majesty wishes, but I'm a merchant, while your son is of royal blood."

"No matter. She is the one my son desires."

When the merchant returned home, he said, "Catarina, I've learned that the prince wants you as his wife. What do you say?"

"I accept."

Within a week everything was ready. (Don't imagine these people lacked wool for the mattresses, or chests of drawers!) Caterina had twelve bridesmaids, and when they opened the royal chapel, the marriage took place.

After the ceremony the queen told the bridesmaids to carry out their task of undressing the princess for bed, but the prince said no. "I don't want anybody to undress her or dress her, or any guards outside our door!" As soon as they were alone he said, "Catarina, do you recall that slap you gave me at school? Are you sorry for it now?"

"Why should I be sorry? I'll give you another if you want!"

"You mean you have no regrets?"

"Not in the least."

"And you're not going to apologize?"

"Why should I?"

"So that's how it is, is it? Well, I'll teach you a lesson!"

And he prepared a rope to drop her down a trapdoor into a pit.

One last time he asked, "Catarina, either you apologize, or I drop you down through this trapdoor."

The maiden replied boldly, "Fine. I'll be cooler down there."

And so without further ado, he dropped her into the pit with nothing but a small table and chair, a jug of water, and a piece of bread.

The next morning the king and queen came to visit the newlyweds to wish them the customary “good morning.”

“Nobody is allowed in,” said the prince, “because Catarina isn’t feeling well.” Then he opened the trapdoor and asked,

“How was it last night?”

“Just fine, nice and cool.”

“Have you thought about that slap you gave me?”

“You should think about the next one I’ll be giving you.”

When two days had gone by, she began to feel terrible hunger pangs and couldn’t think of what to do. Then she pulled one of the stays out of her corset and began digging a hole in the wall. She dug and dug, and after twenty-four hours she saw a glimmer of daylight that cheered her up. So she widened the opening and looked out. It just so happened that her father’s clerk, Don Tommaso, was walking past that spot, and she called out, “Don Tommaso, Don Tommaso!” The man couldn’t figure out how this voice could be coming out of a wall.

“It’s me, Catarina! Tell my father that I need to speak to him as soon as possible!”

So Don Tommaso came back with her father (who couldn’t have found the place by himself), and she called out:

“Father, unfortunately my husband has lowered me into this underground pit. Have a tunnel dug from the basement of our house all the way here with supporting arches and a lantern every twenty feet. Then leave the rest to me.”

While they were carrying this out, her father sent her food every day: hens and chickens and all kinds of good dishes. Three times a day the prince would come and call down the trapdoor,

“Catarina, are you sorry for that slap you gave me?”

“Not at all. I’m thinking about the next one I’ll be giving you.”

Once the craftsmen had completed the tunnel with arches and lanterns every twenty feet, Catarina would wait until the prince closed the trapdoor and then go to her father’s house. After a few days the prince grew frustrated with this game. He opened the trapdoor and called down:

“Catarina, I’ve decided to go to Naples. Do you have anything to say to me?”

“Have a nice trip, and don’t forget to write. And by the way, you know that old saying, ‘See Naples and die’? Please don’t take it literally!”

“So then, I should leave?”

“I can’t believe that you’re still here.”

And so the prince departed.

As soon as the trapdoor was closed, Catarina ran to her father.

"Father, father, I really need your help now. Get me a brigantine ready to sail, servants and a housekeeper and a supply of fancy gowns, and send them all to Naples. Rent me a palace that faces the royal palace, and wait for me there."

Her father loaded the brigantine and sent it off. In the meantime, the prince had prepared a fine frigate and sailed away on it. When Catarina saw the prince depart from her father's balcony, she got on another brigantine and arrived in Naples before he did. (Small boats travel faster than large ones.) Once she arrived, she got into her finest gown and went out on her balcony. For a week she paraded opposite the royal palace in her finest gowns. Finally, the prince, having fallen in love with her, sent a messenger to her palace.

"My lady, if it pleases you, the prince would like to pay you a visit."

"At my lord's service," she replied.

And so the prince arrived, dressed all in his finest. After the usual compliments and conversation, he asked,

"Are you married or single?"

"Single," she replied, "And you?"

"I, too, am single. And do you know what? You bear a great resemblance to a lady I was in love with in Palermo. I'd like to have you as my wife."

"I accept," she said.

And within a week they were married.

Soon she was pregnant—time passes quickly in a story—and in nine months Catarina gave birth to a handsome baby boy. The prince came to her bedside and asked, "What shall we name him?"

"Naples," she answered, and so the boy's name was Naples.

Two years passed, and the prince wanted to leave. Despite his wife's protests he insisted on it. He left a document with her, declaring that the boy was his firstborn and heir to the throne. Then he went off to Genova.

As soon as he was gone, Catarina wrote to her father asking him to have a brigantine loaded with furniture, servants and a housekeeper to be sent to Genova. She also asked him to rent a house opposite the royal palace and to wait for her there. As soon as the prince departed, Catarina took another ship, arrived there before the prince did, and set herself up in the new house. When the prince saw this beautiful woman with all her jewels, wealth, and royal coiffure, he couldn't help but exclaiming, "Holy Mary, she looks just like Catarina the Wise!" and he sent a messenger to ask if he could pay a visit. She accepted, and after he met her, they began conversing, and he asked, "Are you single?"

"I'm a widow," she replied.

"I too am a widower," he said, "with a little boy. Do you know, by the way, that you bear a great resemblance to a lady I knew in Palermo?"

"How remarkable! But you know the old saying: we all have seven look-alikes in this world."

To make it brief, within a week they were married. Catarina got pregnant, and in nine months—time goes quickly in a story—she gave birth to another baby boy, even handsomer than the first. You can imagine how happy the prince was!

"My princess, what shall we name him?"

"Genova," she replied. And so the child was baptized Genova.

Two months passed, and the prince felt the urge to travel again.

"How can you do this and leave me with the baby?" Catarina asked.

"Don't worry," he said. "I'll leave you a document saying that he is my son and a young prince."

And so he did.

While the prince was readying his departure for Venice, Catarina wrote to her father in Palermo and had him send a brigantine to Venice loaded with servants, a housekeeper, furniture, new clothes, and many other things. The prince departed, and so did Catarina. Since large ships take more time than small ones, Catarina arrived and took up residence first. The prince arrived, moved in, and where do you think he cast his eye? On Catarina's window.

"Oh my God!" he exclaimed. "This woman is the very image of Catarina the Wise! Also the woman in Naples! Also the woman in Genova! But that simply can't be, because Catarina is down in a pit, and the one woman is in Naples, and the other is in Genova. But I'll be damned if she doesn't look exactly like her."

He sent a messenger and arranged a visit, and his first words were:

"Excuse me, madam, but I must say it's amazing how much you resemble a woman I saw in Palermo, and in Naples, and in Genova."

"How remarkable! But you know the old saying: we all have seven look-alikes in this world."

Then they proceeded to carry on the usual conversation.

"Are you single?"

"No, I'm a widow."

"I too am a widower, with two little boys."

By the end of the week they were married. She grew pregnant, the months passed—time goes quickly in a story—her labor pains came, and she delivered a baby girl, as beautiful as the sun and the moon.

"What shall we name her?" asked the prince.

"Venezia."

And so they baptized her Venezia.

Two years went by.

"I'm thinking," the prince said to Catarina, "that I've done enough traveling, and it's time for me to go back to Palermo. But here's what I'll do: before I go I'll give you a document stating that this girl is my daughter and a royal princess."

Upon doing this, he departed, and so did Catarina. She went right to her father's house and through the passageway back to her place under the trapdoor. The prince arrived and went immediately to open the trapdoor.

"Catarina, how are you doing?"

"Just fine."

"Are you sorry now for the slap that you gave me?"

"Not at all. I'm thinking about the next one I'll be giving you."

"Listen, Catarina, I'm planning to get married."

"So what's holding you back?"

"Well, if you're willing to say you're sorry, you'll still be my wife."

"No way."

The prince was stymied. Then he decided on a plan: he announced that his wife had died, and he was looking to re-marry. Then he wrote to request portraits of all the eligible princesses. The portraits arrived, and the one he liked best was the King of England's daughter. Consequently, he sent for her to come with her mother, declaring that he had chosen his new bride.

They arrived in Sicily with the King of England and went right to the palace, since the wedding was to be the very next day. Meanwhile, what did Catarina do but have three gorgeous royal outfits made for her children Naples, Genova, and Venezia. She herself dressed as the queen that she was, and then she took Naples dressed as the crown prince and Genova and Venezia dressed like a little prince and princess, got into a fancy carriage, and drove to the palace. Along the way, she told her children,

"When I tell you, go up to your father and kiss his hand."

Inside the palace, they found the prince sitting on his threshold.

"Naples, Genova, Venezia, go and kiss your father's hand."

As they did this, the prince practically died of shock.

"So this is the next slap!" he exclaimed, coming down and embracing his children. The princess from England was left in the lurch,<sup>26</sup> and the next morning she departed.

26 The Sicilian idiom is more vivid: "she was left with her eyebrow shaved." Pitre cites a custom whereby girls showed they were engaged to marry by shaving their eyebrows. To be "left with your eyebrow shaved" came to describe a rejected fiancée.

Now Catarina explained to her husband how she had managed the whole business, and he begged her forgiveness for all the suffering he had caused her. From that day forward they loved each other dearly.

And so they lived on, in contentment and peace,  
While we just sit here, grinding our teeth.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 7. THE COUNT'S SISTER

**H**ere's a tale that people like to tell. Once there was a count, as rich as the ocean, and he had a young sister, beautiful beyond words. She was just eighteen years old, and the count was so jealous and possessive that he kept her locked away in a small room of the palace. No one had ever seen her, and no one knew her.

Now the wall of the count's palace was next to the prince's palace. The lovely little countess, confined and guarded like a dog, was no longer able to endure her condition. So, during the night, she began digging, softly, softly, and made a hole in the wall of her room, behind a beautiful big picture that was hanging in her room. Well, this hole turned out to be opposite the prince's bedroom and opened behind a picture he had hanging there. So the hole could not be seen on the prince's side.

One night, the countess gave the picture a nudge and peered into the prince's room, and when she saw a precious, illuminated lamp, she addressed it with these words:

"Lamp of silver, lamp of gold, burning bright,  
Is your prince sleeping or awake this night?"

And the lamp answered,

"My lady, you're welcome to come in here,  
The prince is sleeping, have no fear."

So she entered the room, and as she got into bed alongside the prince, he woke up. After he embraced her and kissed her, he asked,

"Where do you live, my lady? Where are you from?  
Is there some realm that you call your home?"

And she laughed with her little golden mouth and replied,

“Prince, what are you saying, what are you asking?  
Just keep quiet, and enjoy what you’re doing!”

When the prince later woke up and no longer saw the divine creature at his side, he dressed like a flash and summoned his councilors. When they arrived, he told them all what had happened and asked,

“What do I have to do to make her stay with me?”

“Oh, your royal majesty,” they answered, “when you are embracing, you must tie her hair to your arm so that you’ll wake up as soon as she tries to leave.”

The next evening the countess repeated her refrain:

“Lamp of gold, lamp of silver, burning bright,  
Is your prince sleeping or awake this night?”

And the lamp answered again,

“My lady, you’re welcome to come in here,  
The prince is sleeping, have no fear.”

She went in and again got into the prince’s bed.

“Where do you live, my lady? Where are you from?  
Is there some realm that you call your home?”

“Prince, what are you saying, what are you asking?  
Just keep quiet, and enjoy what you’re doing!”

Thus they fell asleep, and although the prince managed to tie the countess’s lovely hair to his arm, the countess took some scissors, cut the hair, and disappeared while he was asleep. When the prince woke up, he called out, “Councilors, oh my councilors, the divine creature has vanished!”

The councilors answered, “Oh majesty, next time you must take the end of the little gold chain she wears around her neck and tie it to your own neck.”

The following night the little countess peered into the room and said,

“Lamp of gold, lamp of silver, burning bright,  
Is your prince sleeping or awake this night?”

And the lamp answered,

“My lady, you’re welcome to come in here,  
The prince is sleeping, have no fear.”

When the prince had her in his arms, he asked his usual question.

“Where do you live, my lady? Where are you from?  
Is there some realm that you call your home?”

And she gave her usual answer:

“Prince, what are you saying, what are you asking?  
Just keep quiet, and enjoy what you’re doing!”

The prince managed to tie her little chain around his neck, but when he fell asleep, she cut the chain and disappeared. In the morning the prince called for his councilors and told them what had happened. “Oh your majesty,” they replied, “take a wash basin filled with saffron water and set it under your bed. When she takes off her blouse, grab it and throw it into the basin to soak in the saffron. That way, when she puts it on and leaves, she will leave a trail that you can follow.”

That evening the prince prepared a small basin with the saffron water and went to bed. Midnight came, and the countess said to the lamp,

“Lamp of gold, lamp of silver, burning bright,  
Is your prince sleeping or awake this night?”

And the lamp answered,

“My lady, you’re welcome to come in here,  
The prince is sleeping, have no fear.”

When the prince saw her, he asked his usual question:

“Where do you live, my lady? Where are you from?  
Is there some realm that you call your home?”

And she gave her usual answer:

“Prince, what are you saying, what are you asking?  
Just keep quiet, and enjoy what you’re doing!”

When the prince began to snore, she got up and began to tip-toe away, but she found her blouse all soaked in the basin with the saffron. Without uttering a peep, she wrung it out and squeezed it until it was clean and escaped without leaving a trace.

From that night on the prince waited for his divine creature to come, but he waited in vain and eventually fell into deep despair. But exactly nine months later, he woke up one morning to find a beautiful baby boy sleeping next to him, and he looked just like an angel. It took the prince just seconds to get dressed and begin shouting, “Councilors! My councilors!”

When they arrived, the prince showed them the boy.

"This is my son!" he said. "But how can I ever find out who his mother is?"

The councilors answered, "Oh your royal majesty, you must pretend that the child has died. Then place him in the middle of the church and order all the women in town to come and weep for him. The one who weeps best of all will be his mother!"

And the prince did just what they said, and all kinds of women came.

"My son! My son!" they cried out, and they left the way they came. At last the countess arrived. She was already in tears, and once she saw the baby, she began wailing, tearing her hair, and crying out:

"O son of mine, O my son!  
In trying to get you too much good,  
I cut my blond braids as best I could.  
In looking for more beauty than I can pay,  
I had to give my gold chain away;  
And for carrying vanity much too far,  
A saffron blouse I was forced to wear!"

Now the prince, his councilors, and everyone who was there began to shout: "She's the mother! She's the mother!"

Just at this very moment the count himself arrived, drew out his sword, and pointed it at his sister. But the prince threw himself between them and said:

"My count, hold back! No shame can this woman bring.  
She's been sister to a count, but now she's wife to a king!"

And so the two of them were married right then and there.

They continued to live in contentment and peace,  
While we just sit here, picking our teeth.

*Told by Francesca Leto to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borsetto.*

## 8. THE TALKING BELLY

**I**'ve heard tell, gentlemen, that there was once a king and queen, who had an only son. When he turned eighteen, his father wanted him to get married, but his son said, "Your majesty, it's too soon."

The father kept insisting, and his son always responded, "Your majesty, it's too soon."

One day, so as not to be bothered anymore, he told his father, "All right, I'll marry, but only if I find a maiden whose belly talks."

The king ordered all the bells to be rung and summoned his councilors. As soon as they were gathered together, he said, "I need your advice. My son has told me that he'll only marry a maiden whose belly talks. But I don't want to give my realm to just anyone to enjoy."

A wise old councilor stood up and said, "Your majesty, I think you should call for twelve courtiers. Then give each of them a painter and send them on a journey throughout the entire world—Portugal, Brazil, Spain, and France. Whoever finds the maiden whose belly talks is to have a portrait of her drawn and brought to you. If the portrait pleases your son, all will be well. If it doesn't please him, he'll never say a word again about marrying a maiden whose belly talks."

And this is what the king commanded. Twelve noblemen departed from the court and journeyed all over the map, each one with a painter. One of them, for example, the Duke of Butera, took with him a superb painter, and together with his servant, they traveled far and wide. At one point a sudden storm erupted, and they couldn't see anything because it was so cloudy. So they took refuge in a forest. The servant found shelter in one part, the prince and the painter in another part. Later, when they made their way to the other end of the forest, they saw an old man tilling the soil.

"I greet you, man of the soil," the duke cried out.

And the old man responded, "Welcome, man of war."

"Are you still standing on your own two feet?"

"I'll soon have three feet."<sup>27</sup>

"Do you still see well?"

"I can tie my shoes."<sup>28</sup>

"Is there snow on the mountains?"

"There's still time for me."<sup>29</sup>

The good old man stood up and invited the duke and the painter into his home where there was a maiden who was sitting and weaving. When the duke entered, he said, "Oh, young lady, what is that cloth that you're stretching out?"

"Oh, cavalier, watch what you're doing with your sword!"<sup>30</sup>

27 Implied here is that he will be walking with a cane.

28 Implied is that he can see quite well.

29 The duke has implied that the old man is indeed very old and has white hair on his head (the mountains), and the old man responds that he still has time to live.

30 The expression in Sicilian is: *O Cavaliere, vidi chi ti penni*. Pitre makes clear that this is a reference to the duke's sword. The implication is that he is poking his nose into something that doesn't concern him. There is also a sexual implication.

Then her father turned and asked her, "And your mother?"

"She's gone to make someone see the world who's never seen it before."<sup>31</sup>

"And you, what are you doing?"

"I'm making things dance without a sound."<sup>32</sup>

"And your grandma?"

"She's gone to honor some one who cannot be honored anymore."<sup>33</sup>

The father turned to the duke and said, "Gentlemen, please make yourselves at home, and I'll get you something to eat."

In the meantime, the grandmother and mother arrived, and they all sat down to dinner. While they were all eating, the duke said to the painter in a low voice. "If her belly talks, this maiden will become the wife of the king's son. She does not have one defect."

When it became dark, they all went to bed, and the maiden's mother forgot to prepare a candle for the duke. During the night he looked for a light. Since he could not find any, he stood up and searched for a candle, and silently he entered the room where the maiden was sleeping. No sooner did he approach her and begin feeling around in the dark than he touched the belly which said, "Don't touch me because I belong to the prince."

The duke returned to the painter and said, "I've got something to tell you: the maiden's belly is talking in there."

"Well then," replied the painter, "tomorrow I'll draw her portrait, and we'll bring it to the king."

The next day, as soon as they got up, the painter drew the portrait. Then the duke took his leave.

"Farewell," he said. "I'll be seeing you again in a few days."

"It will always be a pleasure to see you," said the old man.

After they reached the first village, the painter finished the portrait. The duke tied it around his neck with a string, and they returned to the court. Meanwhile the other courtiers began gradually returning with their painters. After they all had gathered at the court, the king held a meeting with his councilors and noblemen, and the king listened to them as they showed their pictures. However, the prince found fault in all the portraits. Then Duke Butera stood up and declared, "Your majesty, if this portrait doesn't please you, you'll never find a wife."

And he displayed the portrait that he had been carrying around his neck.

"I like this maiden," the prince announced. "But does her belly talk?"

31 Implied is that the mother has gone to help deliver a baby as midwife.

32 Implied is the water is boiling in the pot, and the pasta is moving about.

33 She has gone to visit someone who has just died.

“Yes, your majesty.”

“Well then, she will be my wife.”

Beautiful garments were prepared for the maiden as well as four coaches and twelve chambermaids. They all got into one of the coaches—the duke, the chambermaids, and the servants—and they departed to fetch the maiden.

When the good old man saw the coaches, he immediately realized they were coming for his daughter. After the coaches arrived and stopped, the duke descended and bowed before the maiden and said to her that the king’s son wanted to have her for his wife. The chambermaids bathed her, dressed her, and helped her climb into the coach, all in a grand display. The maiden wept for joy and embraced her father and mother. Then she asked permission to depart and left.

The king, queen, and prince were all at the palace awaiting her. The prince took her by the arm and led her to a great party in her honor. That night, before going to her bed (for they had not been married yet) the prince said to his mother: “Your majesty, when she is asleep, please enter her room, touch her belly, and see if it talks.”

His mother did as he asked. When the maiden was sound asleep that night, she entered the room and touched her belly.

“Don’t touch me. I belong to the prince.”

She withdrew her hand, and afterward she told her son, “Everything’s all right, my son. You’ve found what you’ve been looking for.”

The next day, as soon as the royal chapel was opened, they got married. But let us leave them while they are entertaining themselves and turn to another story.

Once upon a time there were two merchants, very good companions. These two friends loved each other as much as they loved their own eyes. One of them had a beautiful mare. Well, one day one of the merchants went to the other and said, “My friend, I must take a trip to Monreale. Would you lend me your mare?”

“Of course, comrade.”

So the merchant rode on horseback to Monreale. While he was in the town, he put the mare in a stable where it gave birth to a colt. Since the mare had to rest after having the colt, the merchant had to wait two days before taking back the horse. After the two days had passed, he got on the mare and returned to Palermo. Then he went to the stable where he left the mare for his friend, and he took the colt to his own home.

The friend’s servant saw that the mare had given birth to a colt and told his master.

"How can that be? How could my friend take the colt and treat me so badly?"

So he went to his comrade's house and said, "Friend, how can you do such a thing when we are bound in friendship?"

"What's wrong? The mare gave birth to the colt while it was in my hands. Therefore, the colt's mine."

There was a lawsuit, and they went to a judge, who said the owner was wrong. So, they went to a higher court, and the same thing happened. Enraged, the poor comrade said, "Well, my friend's a rogue, and he's taking advantage of me by righting a wrong in the courts."

So he went to the king's palace and presented himself before the prince. "I want to thank you, your majesty, for seeing me," and he explained what had happened. However, the prince also told him he was in the wrong and had no right to the colt.

When the merchant left and was descending the stairs, he burst into tears like a baby. The princess saw him and asked, "Why are you crying?"

"Your majesty, let me tell you what's happened," and he told her the entire story.

"Don't despair," she responded. "Just be quiet, and climb those secret stairs over there. Then I'll tell you what you're to do."

The merchant was content and went up the secret stairs. The princess told him that she was the maiden whose belly talks and said, "This evening at midnight, dress the way you are, and cry out: 'Help! Help!' without ever stopping. You're to continue doing this until the guards come and take you to the prince, who'll ask you, 'What's going on? What's wrong?' Your response will be: 'Your majesty, the fish are coming from the sea and are climbing up the mountain.' 'How is that possible?' the prince will ask you, and you'll know just what to say."

The poor comrade did as she instructed. When the king's son heard him scream "Help! Help!" he went downstairs and had him brought up into the palace and asked him, "What's wrong, my poor man? Has something happened to you? Is there something dangerous? Speak!"

"Your majesty, we're lost," he cried out. "The fish are coming from the sea and are climbing up the mountain!"

"How's that possible?" the king's son said. "How is that possible?"

"And how's it possible," the merchant replied, "that you've allowed my comrade to keep my colt?"

Upon hearing these words, the prince said, "Very well, the mare is yours, and the colt is yours as well. Go down to my stable and take the horse you want. But I know that these words did not come from your mouth."

Early the next morning, the prince said to the princess, "Since you've mixed your nose into my affairs, take whatever you want from the palace, whatever appears to be yours and whatever you like, and leave!"

"My prince," she responded, "I would like a month's time to do this."

"Take as long as you want."

And what do you think the princess did? Well, she summoned many artisans—bricklayers, carpenters, painters, and decorators—and said to them: "Within twenty-eight days I want you to build me a palace that's to be the finest imaginable, but it must be completely different from this one, and I want you to build it so that it is facing this one."

On the evening of the twenty-seventh day, the palace was ready with tapestry, sofas, and all sorts of comfort. On the twenty-ninth day, the princess called the prince and said to him that it would give her great pleasure to have dinner with him that night. While they were eating that evening, she put a sleeping potion into his glass of wine. So, when the prince drank it, he soon fell asleep. Then the princess had him dressed in his best clothes and carried over to her palace.

The next morning, as soon as he awoke, the king's son glanced around the room, and he had no idea where he was. So he went back to sleep. Then he awoke again, and he could not believe his eyes. Finally, he cried out: "Hello! Hello! Where are we?"

Then his wife appeared, and the king's son recalled the agreement that he had made with the princess a month ago.

"You're still here?" he said.

"What do you mean 'still here?' You told me that I could take with me whatever I liked. Well, I like you, and I've taken you with me."

"You're right," the prince said. "The first time you showed me you were right was with the mare. Now it's with this palace. Do you know what I say to you? Take this kingdom and rule with your talents in your own way. You have a grand sense of justice, good enough for yourself and for others."

And this is what was done.

To be sure, they lived happy and content,

while we just sit here without a cent.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina at Palermo.*

## 9. THE THREE COTTAGES

There was once a king, so it's been told, and this king had only one son who refused to get married. The reason was that he was devoted to a young maiden who made him forget about all other women and who had captured his heart. But the prince's father continually insisted he marry a suitable princess, and one day the prince said to him, "Papa, I'll get married, but there's one condition. You must have the portraits of all the princesses from all the kingdoms sent to me, and I'll pick whoever appeals to me."

His father quickly sent out his couriers, and soon he had all the portraits that he wanted. The prince, who had given his word and had thought it was going to be impossible to obtain all the portraits, found himself in hot water. Now he had to choose among all the portraits, and he chose the daughter of the King of Turkey. Within a few days everything was arranged for the wedding. But no sooner had he married the princess than he left her in the lurch, locked himself in a room, and would not speak with anyone.

The queen mother did not know how to get them back together. So she decided to do the following: She ordered three cottages built in three different places, and she had one painted red, the other blue, and the third green. The next day she invited a few noble friends to the red cottage, all dressed in red. Then she brought her son.

After lunch, while her son was walking in the garden, she sent the princess there, too. They walked together for a while, and then the young woman, who had been instructed what to say, asked him, "Prince, will you pick a lemon for me?"

The prince did as she asked, and after he gave her a peeling knife, *swish!* She cut off her finger and cried out: "What a vile knife! What a vile master!" And with a painful cry, she attached her finger and went to the queen who departed quickly with her friends.

The next day they went to the blue cottage, and the same thing happened. As soon as her finger was cut off, the young woman ran off with the others. The following day they went to the green cottage, and it was the same story. But this time the prince could not stand any more of this, and so he went to his mother and asked her what he had done to the princess for her to call him a vile person.

"What have you done!" his mother responded. "Come here!"

And she took him into another room where the princess was sitting. He found her with the three fingers all attached. What did you expect? Love

always finds its way back to its proper place. The prince embraced her, and they enjoyed the rest of their days happy and content.

*Collected by Mattia Di Martino in Noto.*

## 10. WATER AND SALT

Gentlemen, I want to tell you a wonderful tale that's been told time and again.<sup>34</sup>

Once upon a time there was a king with three daughters, and while they were sitting at the table one day, their father said, "Well now, let's see which one of you loves me the most."

The oldest daughter turned to him and said, "Papa, I love you as much as my own eyes."

"Papa, I love you as much as my own heart," responded the second daughter.

Finally, the youngest said, "Papa, I love you as much as salt and water."

The king was offended and cried out, "You love me as much as salt and water?! Me? Quick, call the executioners. You're to be killed right away!"

The executioners arrived and took the maiden. Her sisters were filled with pity and gave the executioners a small dog and said to them, "When you arrive in the woods, kill the little dog. Then tear off our sister's blouse, but don't you dare touch her. Leave her in the cave."

When the executioners arrived in the woods, they killed the dog, tore the blouse to pieces, and left the youngest sister in the cave. Afterward they ripped out the dog's tongue and brought it to the king at the palace,

"Your majesty, here is your daughter's tongue and her blouse."

So, the king gave them a reward. But let's now drop them and turn to the maiden.

A wild man<sup>35</sup> passed by, and she told him all about her misfortune.

"Do you want to come with me?" the wild man asked.

"What can I do here? I'll come along."

He picked up his bundle of wood, and they went to his hut. Then he placed her in charge of the house and all the things in it.

<sup>34</sup> This is the particular manner that storytellers began their tales in Vallelunga.

<sup>35</sup> *Un omu sarvaggiu* (Sicilian) or *un uomo selvaggio*. Pitre notes that he is a sorcerer.

"You'll find everything you want here. Now thank the Lord who's come to your aid, and don't be afraid of anything."

They ate, and he went out to hunt because he was a savage, and she stayed at home. In the morning she got up, did her hair, washed herself, and threw away the water. On the window sill there was a turkey, and the turkey began to sing:

"In vain you comb your hair and make yourself neat!  
The wild man will come and turn you into mince meat."

Upon hearing these words, she began to weep, and when the wild man arrived, he said to her, "What's the matter?"

"What's the matter? What do you think the matter is? I washed my face, and when I threw away the water, a turkey said to me,

'In vain you comb your hair and make yourself neat!  
The wild man will come and turn you into mince meat.' "

"Ah!" responded the wild man. "You foolish girl, if the turkey says this to you again, you must respond:

'Oh, turkey, turkey,  
with your feathers, I'll make a pillow,  
with your meat I'll make a nice bite to eat,  
for soon I'll be the wife of your owner.' "

The next day, after she responded in this way, the turkey shook and threw off nearly all its feathers. Later, when the prince came by and appeared at the window and saw the turkey almost completely bare, he was astounded and wanted to find out how this had happened. The next day the maiden washed herself and her hair and threw away the water, whereupon the turkey said:

"In vain you comb your hair and make yourself neat!  
The wild man will come and turn you into mince meat."

And she responded:

"Oh, turkey, turkey,  
with your feathers I'll make a pillow,  
with your meat I'll make a nice bite to eat,  
for soon I'll be the wife of your owner."

The prince, who had been hiding nearby, watched everything. Indeed, he saw how the turkey shook the rest of the feathers from its back and noticed that the princess had a beautiful face that only the good Lord could have made. When he returned home, he exclaimed,

“Hurry, papa! I want to get married, and I want that maiden!”

“Let’s see who the maiden is,” the father said. “I think she belongs to the wild man.”

They sent messengers to the wild man to ask for her hand, and he responded, “I’ll do as you like, and if she accepts the prince’s offer, I’ll give my consent.”

He called the maiden and talked with her. Indeed, the maiden listened to the request, pretending that she didn’t want to leave the wild man, but inside she felt that she had been in the grip of the wild man for a hundred years and wanted to get away. Enough said. She gave her consent, and the wedding date was set. Then the wild man said to the maiden: “Listen to me. The day before you are to marry, you’re to kill me. Then you must invite three kings, and the first one will be your father. Then tell your servants that they are to pass out salt and water to everyone except your father.”

So, they did as he said and sent the invitations to the three monarchs.

Now let’s turn to the father of the maiden. The more time passed, the more he was tormented by the thought of his daughter’s death. He was sick with grief. When he received the invitation to the wedding, he said, “How can I possibly go there when all I think about is my daughter.”

Although he didn’t want to go, he also thought:

“If I offend that king because I don’t go, he may declare war against me some time.”

So he picked himself up and went.

The day before the wedding, the prince and princess killed the wild man and quartered him. Then they put each part in four different rooms, and they spread his blood in all the rooms and on the stairs (because the turkey told them to do this). Wherever there was flesh and blood, it turned into gold and precious stones. When the three kings arrived and saw the stairs completely made of gold, they didn’t dare put their feet on them.

“Never mind,” the prince said. “Climb the stairs. There’s nothing to fear.”

That evening the prince and princess were married. The next day they sat down at the table to eat, and the prince told the servants, “Salt and water, but nothing for that king.”

They began to eat, and the princess sat next to her father, but her father didn’t eat.

“Your majesty,” she said, “why aren’t you eating? Perhaps the food isn’t good?”

“On the contrary! It’s really good!”

“Well then, why aren’t you eating?”

“It’s that I don’t feel very well.”

The husband and wife passed some pieces of meat to him. The king did not want any and chewed his food like a goat (as if he could eat it without salt). When they finished eating, they all began to tell stories. The king, sick as he was, told the entire story about his daughter.

"Your majesty," his daughter remarked, "if you happened to see her again, would you recognize your daughter?"

"Oh, my God! I only remember her from the last time I saw her."

The princess got up and went to put on the clothes that she had worn when her father had sent her to her death.

"Well now, your majesty, do you recognize your daughter? You wanted me killed because I had said that I love you as much as salt and water. Now you've seen what it means to eat without salt and water."

Her father could not manage to open his mouth. He threw himself at her, embraced her, and asked for her pardon.

Well, they remained happy and content  
While we still sit here without a cent.

*Told by Elisabetta Sanfratello at Vallelunga.*

## 11. MY THREE BEAUTIFUL CROWNS

**O**nce upon a time there was a washerwoman who had a daughter, and one day this woman went to deliver the laundry. When she returned home, she caught a cold. So, before she went to bed, she took some bread and a bottle of oil and gave them to her daughter.

"My daughter," she said, "I'm going to the hospital. Here's some bread and oil to eat."

She locked the door behind her and stuck the key into her pocket. At the hospital her fever rose. So she took confession, and during the confession she gave the key to her house to the priest.

"Father," she said, "I have a daughter at home, and I'm feeling miserable that I must leave her abandoned in the middle of the road of life."

"My dear woman, don't worry. I'll look after your daughter. I'll take her to my home, and she'll be raised by my mother and sister."

After the woman died, the priest thought of everything, but unfortunately he forgot to go and open the door for the girl. Saturday came, and while the priest's mother was emptying his pockets to wash his pants, she saw the key.

"My son," she said, "whose key is this?"

"Oh, no! I forgot all about what I was supposed to do!" the priest exclaimed.

He took the key and ran to open the door for the maiden. When he stuck the key into the keyhole, the maiden cried out, "Mamma!" Instead, she saw the priest.

"Quiet down," he said. "Your mother is at my home."

And he brought her to his home, where the maiden called out:

"Mamma! Mamma!"

But her mother did not appear. Finally they told her that her mother was in paradise. However, the poor maiden would not settle down until she had her mother. She turned around and ran off into the fields where she wandered until she saw a palace completely draped in black from the gates to the windows as though some one were being mourned. She entered and saw large rooms. In the kitchen there were all kinds of blessed things. Then she went into the other rooms and saw that everything was in disarray. So, she took a broom and began cleaning up everything. After she cleaned the rooms, she polished the lamps, beat the mattresses, took out the sheets, prepared the beds, and made the palace sparkle like gold. Then she went into the kitchen, took a chicken, and began to make some broth. After she lit the rooms, she went and hid herself. At midnight she heard a voice from outside:

"Oh! My three beautiful crowns! Oh! My three beautiful crowns!"

The voice came toward the palace, and as soon as the sounds echoed nearby, a lady entered.

"Oh, how fine and clean everything is!" she said. "How did it become so fine? Oh, come here, my son! Oh, come here my daughter! If you are a man, I'll take you for my son. If you are a woman, may the Lord repay you!"

The maiden heard her words, came out of her hiding place, and threw herself at the lady's feet. When the lady saw her, she said, "Oh! My daughter, the Lord will repay you for restoring everything as you've done. Every day I go out and search for my three beautiful crowns. Now you are the mistress here. The keys are yours. Do what you want."

One day, when the maiden was alone, she began to take a tour of the large palace. As she was walking about, she saw a little door. She opened it and saw three handsome young men. Their eyes were open, but they didn't speak. So she closed the door very quickly.

"The lady's been right to search! I believe those young men are her sons!"

That evening the lady returned and kept crying out, "Oh! My three beautiful crowns!" And when she arrived at the palace, she said, "My daughter, may the Lord repay you for the good that you've done me!"

Some time later the maiden was standing at the window and was bored. As

she looked into the garden below, she saw a snake with three little ones. The mother snake left them alone for a moment. All at once another snake came and killed the three little ones. When the mother snake returned, she saw her three dead children. The snake began to wriggle and hurl itself here and there until it crawled and picked a particular herb. Then it began to rub the first little snake with it, and the snake revived. She rubbed the other two, and they revived. The maiden was smart, and when she saw all this, she took a rock and threw it up at the leaves that had been used as herbs to revive the little snakes. Then she went into the garden with a basket and collected a few of the herbs. Afterward she climbed the stairs, opened the door where the young men were lying, and began to rub them with the herbs. She rubbed and rubbed until the first one was revived. When he recovered, he said, "My sister! You've restored my life!"

She quickly locked the door behind her, went to the kitchen, killed a chicken, and made some broth. Then she returned and gave it to the young man she had revived. Afterward she prepared a bed for him and made him go to sleep. Next she went to help the other two young men, who expressed their gratitude when they were revived. Once again she cooked some broth, made up the beds, and put them to sleep. When the young men recuperated, they began to ask her where the empress was, and she remarked, "So the lady is an empress!" Then she turned to the young men and said, "You're not to move from here, and I'll bring the lady to see you."

When the lady returned that night, she called out, "Oh! My three beautiful crowns!"

The maiden began to chat with her and she asked, "Tell me, my lady, why do you always leave every day?"

"Ah, my daughter, I leave every day to search for my three beautiful crowns."

"But, my lady, who are these three beautiful crowns?"

"Listen: when my husband was alive, I had three sons, and they were spirited away one day, and I have been searching for them ever since."

"Well then, my lady, would you do me a favor? Please don't go in search of them any more from tomorrow on. I'll go and find your sons."

"My daughter, are you telling the truth?"

"I give you my word. I'll find your sons for you."

"How much time do you want, my daughter?"

"One week."

"One week," the lady repeated. "Well, from tomorrow on, I won't search for them."

So, what did the maiden do? First, she gave the lady's sons something to eat

without revealing their mother to them. Then she waited on the empress, groomed her, and dressed her in the most beautiful clothes because she was going to see her sons. Meanwhile the young men watched her from an opening in the door, but they did not let themselves be noticed.

After four days had passed, the maiden said to the empress, "My lady, you can now send invitations to your friends because I shall be bringing your sons on Sunday."

Upon hearing these words, the empress began to cry from joy, "Ah, my daughter, how can I begin to repay what you've done for me?"

Since she was an empress, she invited all the nobles of the court and spent the entire day following and kissing the maiden. On the seventh day, she was happy because she was to go to see her sons, and she said to the maiden, "Listen to me now, my daughter: if it's true that you're going to bring back my sons to me, I shall give you the oldest as your husband."

Things happen fast in stories! Once the week was over, the entire court appeared along with the army, the cavaliers, and all the subjects of the empire. But the empress still did not see her sons! Soon, however, the door to the throne room opened, and the maiden whom the empress had dressed in a beautiful gown, appeared, and the empress took her by the arm. She showed her to the entire court because the maiden had found her sons. While she was waiting, another door opened, and three handsome young men appeared. Imagine the happiness of the empress! The mother threw herself at her sons and embraced them while warm tears streamed down her cheeks. The band began to play the Gloria, and it's not so surprising!

They immediately sent for the priest to preside over the marriage between the maiden and the oldest son. Indeed, the wedding service was performed for the very best of emperors because the prince had become emperor now that his father was dead.

Well, they are happy and living in peace

While we just sit here and pick at our teeth.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 12. KING DEAD HORSE

**I**'ve heard tell that there was once a father, who led a miserable life. He had three daughters, and one day the eldest daughter said, "Father, why don't you go and search for my fate?"

"My daughter, how can I do this when I'm dying from thirst and hunger?"

The daughter knew what to do and pawned her handkerchief to buy him a piece of bread. This way her poor father could depart with God's grace to search for her fate. When he arrived on top of a mountain, he began to cry out, "Oh fate of my eldest daughter!"

All at once an old man appeared and said, "What do you want, good man?"

"What do you think I want? I have a daughter who can't make ends meet, and I've come in search of her fate so that she can be helped."

"Well then, take this horse. Go and sell it, but make sure that you demand at least one hundred gold coins for it."

As soon as he returned to his village with this beautiful horse, the father was surrounded by many people who wanted to buy the horse which he quickly sold. Then he took the hundred gold coins to his daughter. However, his two other daughters became jealous when they saw their sister receive such a treasure. So they had their father return to the old man to satisfy the middle daughter's needs.

This time the father returned with a horse as beautiful as the first one, and he sold it as soon as he entered the village. Very content, he brought the money to the girl.

Now the youngest daughter had nothing, and her poor father wanted to make her happy as well. So he sought out the old man once again and received a beautiful horse with a star on its forehead. This time the old man set a new condition so that the father had to sell the horse only to the person who managed to feed it. The father traveled to another village and was once more surrounded by people, but the horse would not eat from anyone's hand. In desperation the father brought the horse to the king who, as soon as he saw it, wanted to own it at any price. But how could the father do this when the horse refused to eat from the king's hands? Armed with patience the poor father was about to take the horse away when the king's daughter appeared. As soon as she caught sight of the horse, she fell in love with it, and she, too, wanted to try—and the horse ate out of her hands.

"Father," the princess said, "the horse is mine. Give this good man as much money as the animal weighs."

Now let us leave the father with his daughters and pick up the story of the princess and her horse. Indeed, she insisted that the horse be kept in her room, where she fed it the very same things that she herself ate. Then one night, while she was resting, she found a handsome young man in front of her instead of the horse. And from then on she stayed away from everyone so that her father no longer knew what to think about this.

But one day a faithful friend asked her why she had changed so much, and

the princess, much too trusting, told her everything, but she also requested that her friend keep her secret and told her not to try to see the young man. Otherwise, they would suffer a great deal, she as much as he. But the princess shouldn't have ever told her friend anything! In fact, her faithful friend thought only of hiding behind the door so she could look through the key-hole which she did, and consequently, the horse instantly disappeared.

When the princess saw what had happened, she almost went out of her mind from the pain she suffered, and she ran all over the palace. Finally, she decided to go off on a secret quest to find the horse. Since she didn't know where to look for him, she became lost in the middle of the forest. After walking for some time she saw a small house where she knocked and heard a powerful voice.

"Who is it?"

"A Christian soul."

"A Christian soul in these woods?"

After entering, the princess encountered the daughter of the ogress Mamma-draga. Frightened, she asked her if she knew King Dead Horse.

"My daughter," she responded. "I don't know a thing, but when my mother returns, I'll ask her. Now you must hide. If she sees you, she'll eat you."

No sooner did the girl hide herself than the Mamma-draga arrived, sniffing left and right, until she cried out,

"I smell the flesh of a human!  
I want to swallow this woman!"

"What are you saying, mamma?" her daughter replied.

"You've come from the woods and the sea.  
Your nose is stuffed up. Just let things be."<sup>36</sup>

Since dinner was ready, the Mamma-draga began eating, and her daughter asked, "Mamma, many birds flew by, and they kept saying, 'King Dead Horse, King Dead Horse.' Can you tell me who this king is and where he can be found?"

"Oh, my daughter, this king is suffering many torments and pain because of a little wretch who's searching for him right now. If she ever shows her face

36 "Chi ciáuru di carni munnana!  
Unni la viju mi l'agghiuttu sana!"  
"Chi dicitì, matri mia!  
Viniti di ssi voschi e ssi marini,  
E ni purtati li nasci cini!"

here, I'll tear her to pieces! But I don't know where he is. Perhaps my sisters know more. However, one mouthful of my spit could be useful in finding him."

While she was saying this, her daughter turned to her and cried out, "Mother, what have you swallowed?"

The Mamma-draga spit out a mouthful that turned into the form of a walnut, which her daughter quickly hid in her lap. After they finished eating, the Mamma-draga went to sleep, and her daughter fetched the girl from her hiding place and told her what she had heard. Then she gave her the walnut and advised her to go in search of her mother's sisters.

So the maiden set out and went to the second Mamma-draga. And to be brief, she received an almond. Then the maiden left in search of the third ogress, who gave her a hazelnut that she would need and sent her to the sun to get news about King Dead Horse. When the maiden arrived at an open space where thirteen children were playing, she asked them once again about the king, but they didn't know anything. However, after making her hide so that she would not be burned by the sun, they promised her to ask him. Just when it turned eleven-thirty at night, the sun returned, but he didn't know a thing, and he sent her to the moon, who, in turn, sent her to the North Wind.

So the maiden started out walking and met a man as large as a mountain and a woman weaving with an immense distaff. Thanks to them she learned that the Mother of the Wind was living in a grand palace, and as soon as she saw the maiden and learned all about her quest, she promised to ask her sons about the king upon their return. Meanwhile she put the maiden to bed and covered her well for fear that the North Wind might freeze her when he arrived. Little by little her seven sons returned home, and their mother asked them about King Dead Horse. But only the North Wind, who entered after having been all over the world, could satisfy her. He told her that he had seen him in a palace on a bed with vases on each side of him, and the king could be brought back to life only when they were filled with tears. Moreover, he told her that, in order to find the way to him, it was necessary to hit the ground three times with the staff that he himself had with him. Then, the three gifts of the ogresses were necessary: the walnut to find the entrance, the almond to find the floor where the room was located, and the hazelnut to find the king himself.

Upon hearing this, the maiden's only thought was to take the staff, search for the palace, and use the three gifts to find the king. Indeed, she did this and found him just as the North Wind had said she would and began to weep many tears. But just as she came to an end and needed only a few more drops to fill the vases, she had to rest a moment and get a breath of fresh air. So she

went to a window in the hallway where she saw a boat arriving on the beach. A slave got off and seemed to be waving to her so that the maiden called to her and told her to mount the stairs. Well, since women will be women and always spill out what they know, she told the slave her entire story. As she finished telling it, the slave told her to rest for a while, and the maiden let herself be persuaded. Quickly, the slave took advantage of the situation and began weeping and finished filling the vases with her tears. When King Dead Horse recovered and saw the slave, he thought that she was the princess and began telling her all that he had suffered because of her. The slave, who knew everything, told him all about the journey she had made, but the prince couldn't understand how she had become so ugly. Since he wasn't convinced that she was the princess, he said that she would have to wait one year, one month, and one day before he could marry her—and he departed for his country.

In the meantime the maiden had awakened, and when she didn't see anyone, she realized that she had been betrayed and began to go out of her mind. Fortunately she found a diamond in a jewel box, and as soon as she touched it, the diamond said: "Your wish is my command!"

"What shall I command?" the maiden thought. "Well, I wish that this palace were in front of the palace of King Dead Horse!"

All this happened immediately on the day that the slave was supposed to marry the king at a grand ball in the evening, for a year had passed. But on that very same morning the king looked out his window and saw a palace with a lady at the window. He fell madly in love with her and had her invited to the celebration before the wedding. No sooner was she by his side than he felt his spine tingle. Then he took her by the arm and went to the dinner. After they finished eating, the old king, his father, said to the slave, "Now that my son is to marry, each one of you is to tell about the sufferings you've experienced."

The slave was the first to begin telling about her torment, but the princess interrupted her and said that she was not telling the truth. So she began to tell all that had happened, including the trick that the slave had played on her. Upon hearing this, King Dead Horse embraced the maiden and ordered the royal chapel to be prepared for the wedding. However, for the slave he ordered a kettle in which she was scalded three days and three nights.

So, they remained happy and content

But we were left without a cent.

*Collected by Mattia di Martino in Noto.*

### 13. SNOW WHITE, FLAMING RED

**T**here was once a king and a queen without children. They continually made vows and swore that if a son or even a daughter was born to them, they would have two fountains built for a seven-year period, one flowing with wine and the other with oil. After this vow, the queen became pregnant and gave birth to a handsome baby boy.

As soon as the king and queen had their child, two fountains were built, and all the people came and took their oil and wine there. At the end of seven years the fountains began to dry up, and a Mamma-draga, an old ogress, wanted to gather those few drops that were still trickling. She approached one of the fountains with a sponge and a pitcher to soak up and squeeze out what she could, soaking and squeezing, soaking and squeezing. After she worked very hard to fill her pitcher, the king's son, a mere boy, who had been playing with his bocce balls, picked up one and, as a whim, hurled it at the pitcher. As soon as the pitcher shattered, the old woman realized what he had done and said to him, "Listen, because you're the king's son, I can't lay a finger on you, but I can lay this curse on you: may you never marry until you find Snow White, Flaming Red!" Since he was a clever boy, he picked up a piece of paper, wrote down the woman's words, and stored the paper in a drawer without ever telling anyone about it. When he reached the age of eighteen, the king and queen were eager for him to marry. But he remembered the old woman's curse, and after he fetched the piece of paper, he said, "Ahh! Unless I can find Snow White, Flaming Red, I can't get married!"

After showing the paper to them, he took leave of his parents and began traveling all by himself. He walked and walked. Months passed without him meeting anybody. Then one fine evening, as it was growing dark, he found himself in the countryside, tired and discouraged. Nearby there was a large house. At daybreak he saw a frightfully big, fat Mamma-draga, who cried out:

"Snow White, Flaming Red, let down your hair so that I can climb up!"

When he heard these words, he took heart and said to himself, "She's there!"

Snow White, Flaming Red let down her hair that was so very long it never seemed to end, and the Mamma-draga took hold of it and climbed up. Then she ate a good meal, while the prince waited outside, beneath a tree. The next day the ogress descended, and when the prince watched her depart, he came out from under the tree and called loudly, "Snow White, Flaming Red, let down your hair so that I can climb up."

Believing it was her mother (because she was used to calling the Mamma-

draga her mother), she loosened her hair, and the young prince boldly climbed up. As soon as he arrived, he said to her, "Ah, my little sister, how hard I've worked to get here and find you!" And then he told her all about the curse the old woman had put on him when he was only seven years old.

She helped him refresh himself and gave him something to eat. Then she said, "Look, the Mamma-draga is coming! If she finds you here, she'll eat you. Hide yourself."

The Mamma-draga came just as the prince hid himself.

"Snow White, Flaming Red, let down your hair!" the Mamma-draga said.

"I'm coming. I'm coming, mother!" and Snow White, Flaming Red ran in order to pull her up with care. She let down her hair, and the Mamma-draga climbed up and found her dinner ready for her. She ate, and after she ate, Snow White, Flaming Red gave her something to drink and made her drunk. When Snow White, Flaming Red saw that she had finished her meal, she said, "Mother, what must I do to get out of here? Of course I don't want to leave. I want to stay with you. But I'd like to know just out of curiosity."

"What must you do to get out of here?" the Mamma-draga said. "You'd have to enchant all that's here in such a way that I'd lose time: if I were to call out to the chair, the table, and the drawer, they would have to respond for you. Then, if you didn't appear, I'd have to climb up. But first you'd have to take the seven balls of yarn that I've been keeping here, and when I come and don't find you, I'd begin pursuing you. When you see me chasing you, you'd have to throw down the balls one after another, but I'd keep trying to catch you until you threw the last ball . . ."

The maiden listened to all that the Mamma-draga told her and stored it in her head until the time was ripe. The next day the Mamma-draga left, and Snow White, Flaming Red and the prince did what they had to do. She went through the entire house and said, "Table, if my mother comes, you're to respond by saying such and such. Chair, if she comes, you're to respond this way. Drawer, if my mother comes, you're to respond that way."

And so she enchanted the entire house and left with the prince in such a hurry that they seemed to fly. When the Mamma-draga returned, she called out, "Snow White, Flaming Red, let down your hair so that I can climb up!"

The table responded, "Come, mamma, come."

She waited a little while, but when no one appeared to pull her up, she repeated, "Snow White, Flaming Red, let down your hair so that I can climb up!"

The chair responded, "Come, mamma, come."

She waited a little while more and no one appeared. Once again she called, and the drawer responded, "Come, mamma, come."

Meanwhile, Snow White, Flaming Red and the prince kept running. When no one responded at all this time, the Mamma-draga cried out, "I've been tricked! I've been tricked!"

She took a ladder and climbed up. But when she reached the top, she couldn't see or find anyone, not even the balls of yarn.

"Ah, you wretch! I'll drink your blood!"

She sniffed and sniffed, and then all at once, after she had their scent, she began to pursue them. When she saw them from a distance, she cried out: "Snow White, Flaming Red, turn around so I can see you!"

(She didn't dare turn around, otherwise, she would have been enchanted.)

When the Mamma-draga drew near, Snow White, Flaming Red threw the first ball of yarn, and suddenly a very high mountain appeared. Mamma-Draga did not let herself be deterred. She climbed over the mountain and kept going until she was once again very close to Snow White, Flaming Red and the prince. So the maiden threw the second ball of yarn, and all at once a plain of razors sharp as knives appeared. The old woman was now completely cut and sliced up, but she continued to run after them dripping with blood. When Snow White, Flaming Red saw her close by again, she threw the third ball, and a large and terrible river appeared. The Mamma-draga threw herself into the river, and when she emerged on the other side, she was more dead than alive. Then Snow White, Flaming Red threw another ball, and a fountain with many vipers and other horrible things appeared. When the last ball was thrown, the Mamma-draga was worn out and couldn't continue anymore. So she stopped and uttered a curse at Snow White, Flaming Red:

"May the prince forget you as soon as his mother the queen gives him a kiss!"

Indeed, this was the Mamma-draga's last breath, and she dropped dead.

Meanwhile, Snow White, Flaming Red and the prince continued running until they reached a village near the prince's palace, where the prince stopped and said to Snow White, Flaming Red, "Listen to me. It's best if you stay here because your clothes are dirty and worn out. I'm going to go and get some things for you so you'll make a better appearance before my father and mother."

So he left her there, and soon after, when his mother saw him appear, she threw her arms around his neck to kiss him.

"Mother," her son said, "I took a vow not to let myself be kissed. It's a vow that I must keep."

His poor mother became petrified. That night, while her son was sleeping, his mother, who was burning with desire, went and kissed him. As soon as she kissed her son, the prince lost all memory of Snow White, Flaming Red.

Now let's leave the prince with his mother and turn to the poor maiden who was in the middle of nowhere. An old woman came by and saw the poor maiden, who was as beautiful as the sun and was crying.

"What's wrong, my daughter?"

"What's not wrong? I don't know what I'm doing here!"

"My daughter, don't get upset. Come with me."

And she took Snow White, Flaming Red to her home. Since the maiden was good with her hands and could work wonders, she made things, and the old woman sold them. This is how they made a living. One day she said to the old woman that she wanted two old pieces of cloth from the royal palace for a thing that she had to make. So the old woman went to the palace and asked for these pieces. Indeed, she kept on asking for them until they gave them to her. Now, the old woman had two doves, one male and the other female, and Snow White, Flaming Red dressed the doves in these pieces so elegantly that they were a marvel to behold. The maiden picked up the two doves and whispered in their ears: "You are the prince, and you are Snow White, Flaming Red. When the king sits down at the table to eat, I want you to fly there and tell everything that has happened."

Later, when the king, queen, prince, and everyone else were eating at the table, the two doves flew there and landed on the table.

"How beautiful they are!"

Everyone began to rejoice. Then the dove, pretending to be Snow White, Flaming Red began to speak:

"Do you remember, when you were little, your father promised to build a fountain of oil and another fountain of wine so that you would be born?"

And the other dove replied, "Yes, I remember."

"Do you remember the old woman whose pitcher you broke? Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember," the dove said.

"And do you remember the curse that she uttered and how she said that you'd never be able to marry until you found Snow White, Flaming Red?"

"I remember," the dove said.

In short, the dove began to recall everything that had happened in the past. At the end the female dove asked, "And do you remember how the Mamma-draga almost caught you and then uttered a curse that you would forget Snow White, Flaming Red as soon as your mother gave you a kiss?"

When they had reached the point concerning the kiss, the prince remembered every single thing. The king and queen felt flabbergasted when they heard the doves speaking. After the doves were done, they made a beautiful bow and flew away.

“Hey there! Hey there! Watch where the doves are going! Watch where they are going!”

The servants rushed to the windows and saw that the doves had flown to a small country house and were perched on the roof. The prince rushed to this house and found Snow White, Flaming Red. When he saw her, he threw his arms around her.

“Ah! My little sister, how you’ve suffered because of me!”

Then he quickly had her dressed in clean clothes and took her to the palace. When the queen saw her, she said, “Oh! How beautiful!”

Then they prepared a feast, exchanged vows and rings, and got married.

They remained happy and in peace

While we still sit here picking our teeth.

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 14. MANDRUNI AND MANDRUNA

**H**ere’s a tale that people like to tell. Once there was a king and queen who were married for a long time, but the good Lord refused to give them either a son or a daughter. One day the queen addressed the Lord and said, “Dear God, if you send me a son or a daughter, I shall proclaim a seven-year holiday.”

Well, the good Lord was pleased and made her pregnant. When she was three months pregnant, the king summoned the astrologer, who said that she was carrying a male child and that the boy had to be named Mandruni. So the king sent this astrologer off with a fine gift.

Months passed—a tale doesn’t keep time—and the queen gave birth to a fine baby boy whom she named Mandruni. A wet-nurse was summoned and began giving him milk. Then they proclaimed the holiday with the following arrangements: in front of the palace they had the fountain equipped with two pipes to send forth oil and wine. All goods were at bargain price and tax-free, and there was a general feast of abundance for the whole city of Palermo.

The child grew by leaps and bounds, and they made golden balls that he was to play with. When he reached the age of seven, he happened to be playing in front of the palace just as the holiday was coming to its end, and only a trickle of oil was coming from the pipe, one drop at a time. At this very moment an old woman arrived from another town carrying a small glass jug, which she placed there in order to fill it. (Just imagine: seven years had passed without

her needing any oil, and it was *exactly* at this moment when the holiday had ended that she felt the need for oil.) Well, the boy spied her, and while the old woman was waiting for her jug to be filled—*boom!*—he threw one of his balls and shattered the jug. The old woman looked at him and said, “You may have won, but listen to this: *Only when you find Mandruna will you be able to marry!*”

From then on the boy was haunted by this curse, and became obsessed by the thought that he would never be able to marry if he didn’t find Mandruna. When he reached sixteen, he mounted a horse and set off alone into the countryside without a word to anyone. Along the way, he met a farmer gathering crops in front of his cottage. “My good man, would you be willing to do me a favor? Let me have your clothing, and I’ll give you mine,” he said.

At first, the farmer was reluctant, but once he realized that the exchange was to his advantage, he took off his shoes, work overalls, and cloak and handed them over.

Mandruni continued on to the next city, pretending to be begging for alms. But underneath he still carried his royal emblem and gold that kept him cheerful. Eventually, he came to a palace, sought out the head coachman, and asked,

“Good sir, would you do me the favor of taking me on as a stable-boy?”

“Come right in and get to work!” said the coachman.

So Mandruni went in, picked up a broom, and began to sweep. After a few days the amount of dirt covering his face made him unrecognizable. This suited him well since he didn’t want anyone to know who he was, and he made no attempt to wash. But the coachman kept teasing him:

“Why don’t you ever try washing that dirty face of yours? It must be because you’re a stable-boy! The good Lord sure does love dirt!”<sup>37</sup>

“Well, all right then,” said Mandruni, and he finally washed his face.

Being the son of a king, Mandruni naturally had a handsome face, and anyone could see he was no commoner. The princess happened to be visiting the stables and came face to face with this stable-boy. She stared at him, and he stared back at her; they each couldn’t help staring. Then the princess asked the head coachman,

“Tell me, who is this fellow?”

“Your highness, he’s just a poor peasant lad that I took on as stable-boy.”

“Oh no, this fellow has to be someone of importance. Come here, lad, and tell me where you come from.”

“I’m from these parts.”

37 Pitrè points out that this is an allusion to a Wellerism. This statement is the first half. The concluding half is, “said the pig as it returned to the pig-sty.”

"What's your name?"

"Francesco." (He had made up a new name for himself.)

"And your father, what does he do?"

"He's a miller."

"And how is it that you left him?"

"Your Majesty, he wanted to beat me, until I finally ran away."

But these words did not seem very convincing to the princess.

A few days later she called him and said,

"Francesco, I'm thinking of having you removed from the stable and elevated to household service. How would that suit you?"

"As you wish," he answered. So the princess spoke to her father, and the king said, "Do as you like."

Now the princess had Mandruni assigned to the kitchen staff. But she continued to feel very uneasy about him<sup>38</sup> and repeatedly went down to the kitchen to ask him directly,

"Francesco, what's your real name?"

"Haven't I told you already? It's Francesco!"

"No, please tell me the truth. Your name's not really Francesco, and in no way are you a miller."

"But I tell you I *am* a miller."

Back and forth they went, until finally Mandruni had to give in, and he told her his whole story, from the beginning to the present: he was Mandruni, son of the King of Sicily, and he had gone off in secret from his father and mother because an old woman had placed a curse on him that he could not marry until he found a maiden called Mandruna.

"But Mandruna is my name!" said the princess, brimming over with joy.

"I didn't realize that."

"Well then, why don't we run off together?"

"Wouldn't everyone recognize you?" he replied.

They pondered this for a while, and finally she came up with a plan.

"Here's what we'll do: tonight you hide yourself in the garden, and at midnight I'll come down, and we'll run off together."

The plan was made, and at midnight the princess brought down trunks filled with linens, fine dresses, gold, silver, and an abundance of clothing. They mounted horses and—dear feet, give me speed!—away they went.

They traveled over long roads, stopping to rest every day, and taking advantage of the warehouses in the countryside to feed themselves. One day, when

38 Literally, "she had the pains of Giulia" (*avia li fitti di Giulia*), which Pitre glosses as a familiar Palermo idiom meaning to be in an uneasy or impatient state over something.

they were in open country and had not rested for a long time, they had to lie down. With Mandruna's head resting upon Mandruni's legs, they fell asleep. While they were sleeping, a crow flew down, plucked a ring from Mandruna's hand, and escaped. But Mandruni heard the flutter of wings, woke up, and saw the crow. Well, what do you think he did? As soon as he got up, he rested Mandruna's head on a little hillock and went off after the crow. He ran, jumped, climbed up and down—all to no avail. In the end he realized he was lost, without either the ring or Mandruna.

Now let's go back to her. She woke up, and finding herself alone and without the ring, she cried out, "You traitor! You said you were taking me away from my home, but only to abandon me! What am I supposed to do now, poor thing that I am?" While she was in this upset condition, along came a peasant.

"My good man," she said, "would you kindly do me a favor? I'll give you my clothes in exchange for yours."

The man agreed, and taking off his heavy cloak, his shoes, and his cap he gave them to Mandruna. When the exchange was complete, she set out walking, and where did she direct her steps? To the very city where Mandruni was born.

Now let's return to Mandruni. The poor fellow, lost as he was, could not find any peace of mind and constantly thought about what had happened. "What is Mandruna going to think?" he said to himself. "She'll certainly think that I took her from her home only to abandon her!" In this sorry state, feeling totally abandoned and weak from hunger, Mandruni was forced to beg for a living. So much suffering and heartbreak reduced him to looking like a leper, whose body is like one big sore.

Now let's return to Mandruna, whom we left as she was entering the city. She asked who was king there, and they told her, "The King of Sicily, and he's in deep mourning over the disappearance of his son Mandruni because he's had no news at all about him."

As she approached the palace, Mandruna found two places for rent, a house and a shop. So she rented them both and opened a perfume shop and an inn. Then she posted a sign that read: *Whoever takes lodging at the inn near the palace gets three days' free room and meals, if he agrees to tell the innkeeper his whole life story.*

Mandruna was back to dressing like a woman, but she now chose to dress like an old nun. So she drew wrinkles on her face and made herself look 60 years old. Of course, every person who encountered her accorded her respect. When poor people came, she would give them three days' lodging. She kept this way of life for seven years, during which time she had no news whatsoever of Mandruni.

Finally, in the seventh year, a very poor man came to town. He was a haggard fellow, all sweaty and smelly. The other poor folk said to him, "Why don't you go stay with the old nun whose house is near the palace? She cares for everyone just like a mother." So this poor fellow, with his walking stick and his old cape, went to Mandruna and asked for charity. She let him come in, and after she had him cleaned up, she asked him to recount all his travels. As they were sitting there, and Mandruna kept looking at him very intently, her heart was telling her that this had to be Mandruni. He was reluctant to speak, but Mandruna urged him, "Tell me what troubles you have experienced. We are put into this world to suffer both the good and the bad. Speak."

"My lady, I am the son of the king of this city (and here Mandruna pricked up her ears!). My father, to ensure my birth, proclaimed a seven-year holiday. When I was a child playing with balls, I threw one that smashed an old woman's water jug. That old woman put a curse on me so that I could not marry until I found someone called Mandruna. At sixteen, I became so obsessed by the curse that I galloped off on horseback, trusting to God and fortune. I met a peasant and changed clothes with him and then went to the palace of the King of France, who had a daughter called Mandruna. We fell in love at first sight and made plans to run off together, and so we did. As night fell, we came to a forest, and Mandruna fell asleep with her head on my legs and I had my back against a tree. Down came a crow, stole Mandruna's ring, and flew off with it. I went after the crow, and she remained sleeping. I got lost and kept searching for her everywhere, but it has been seven years now, my lady, that I have not seen her. Oh my Mandruna, who knows into what hands you have fallen! And I can only imagine what she thought of me! But I am innocent, innocent as holy Mary herself!"

"Don't worry yourself about this any more, my son," said the nun. "No need to fear, because this very day Mandruna was taken away by the good Lord. So would you now consider taking me as your wife?"

"But what if she is alive? She is the one that I want."

"But I am telling you that she is dead. Believe me, I know."

"All right, if she is dead then . . . Well, in that case . . . my answer to you is, Yes."

Mandruna asked for a written statement that he was taking her as his wife, and Mandruni had one made. When Mandruna had this document, she covered her head with a great shawl, proceeded to the palace, and began the lament for the deceased:

"Oh Mandruni my love, how can it be that I've lost you? Mandruni my love, how can it be that I've lost you?"

The queen appeared and asked, “Who is doing all that moaning and groaning out there?”

“It’s an old nun,” said the guards.

“Have her come up to me.”

When Mandruna arrived, the queen asked her, “Who are you crying for, my good woman?”

“I am crying for my son, whose name was Mandruni.”

“But don’t you know that Mandruni was my own son’s name?”

“Your son, really? Well, your Majesty, if Mandruni was your son, I assure you I can bring him back to you this very day.”

“Really? How could you do that?”

“Don’t worry, I can definitely bring your son back to you, but on one condition: that you give him to me as my husband.”

The queen at first refused. But then, for love of her son, she said, “You can have whatever you want, just so long as you let me see my own son alive again.”

Mandrana went down the palace staircase at a run, hurried back to Mandruni, and told him all that had happened—but still without revealing her identity. She took him by the hand and led him to the queen. No one can possibly describe the joy this mother felt at seeing her son again! Talk led to more talk, and then to the subject of marriage. The queen screwed up her face, because she couldn’t stand the thought of her son marrying this old nun. But to herself Mandruna was saying, “If we played your tune, you must pay the piper.”<sup>39</sup>

In the end, to cut it short, the old nun and the young son of the king were to be married. The evening before the ceremony Mandruna went to dress herself, and out she came looking like the princess that she was—a beautiful young woman, her charms dazzling beyond compare. Her royal dress had no less than ten flounces and was decorated with chains of gold and diamonds and precious stones. On her head she had placed a star, which was so bright that you couldn’t look at it without turning your eyes away. You can imagine how none of the guests could take their eyes off her! Then she described all that had happened to her, from the time she fled from her home until the present moment. Mandruni burst into tears of happiness. The queen kept kissing Mandruna from one room to the next, while all the guests kept

39 We have used an English proverb to replace the opaque original, “*bedda carta mi canta ’n cannolu*,” lit. “a fine paper is singing to me in a tube.” Pitre explains in *Proverbi siciliani* that country folk had the habit of storing important documents in tin containers. Thus the proverbial wisdom that a document can “sing out” its vital contents, which cannot be ignored.

offering her their congratulations and best wishes. Then they sent a courier to her own father, who arrived the very next day. And throughout the whole realm they celebrated for a week with joy and pleasure that had never been seen before.

So these folks remained happy and content,  
While we here cannot even pay the rent.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 15. THE KING OF SPAIN

Gentlemen, this wonderful tale has been told time and again.  
Once upon a time the son of the King of Spain asked his mother if he could go off and do some hunting with his men.

"Mother, please tell my father the king how much I'd like to go hunting."

"No, my son, you'll get lost!"

"How could I lose my way if I take some troops with me? Give me two regiments of soldiers, and that way there will be nothing to fear."

So the queen went to the king and said, "Our son wants to go hunting with his men and wants your permission to go."

"No, my wife," he replied. "He'll get lost if he goes."

But the queen kept asking until the king called his general, gave him two regiments of soldiers, and said, "Keep your eyes open and watch over my son for a week. If he becomes lost, you'll lose your head."

The general took the troops and departed with the prince. When they reached the woods, the prince said, "Now we'll camp here and go to sleep."

While the soldiers slept, the prince left the camp and went on his way. When the soldiers awoke and saw that the prince had left the camp, they cried out, "Ahh, what are we to do! We'll certainly lose our heads!"

They immediately began to spread out looking for the prince in the woods, but they weren't able to find him.

"Since we can't find the prince," the general concluded, "we must go and tell the king."

When they returned to the palace, the general said, "Your majesty, you can do with us as you please. The prince disappeared while we were asleep."

"My queen," the king responded, "you see that my words have turned out to be true. So, I'm thinking of cutting off the heads of these poor soldiers."

He decided, however, to pardon them and said, "It's a sign that this was his destiny!"

Now, let's leave the king in his grief and turn to the prince who kept traveling day and night until he came to a cave, where he found a hermit.

"Oh, blessed hermit, I'm lost and would appreciate it if you could tell me where I am."

"Ahh! My son, what's there to tell you?" the hermit replied. "Do you know what you have to do? You must go to my older brother because he can give you better directions than I can."

So, the prince went to the other hermit.

"What do you want here?" the hermit said to him.

And the prince told him everything.

"Don't be discouraged, my handsome lad," he said to him. "There's a house nearby with a magician, who causes trouble to all those who come there. This magician has a daughter. Take this bread and go speak with the daughter who will tell you some secrets that can help you."

The poor young man began to travel once more, and just as the magician's daughter was coming back from fetching water, she saw him.

"Ahh! Handsome lad, what are you doing here?"

The prince recounted everything and asked her to help him get out of there.

"I'll help you," she said to the young man, "but will you marry me if I do?"

"Yes, but what's your name?"

"My name's Bifara. But pay attention. My father's about to come home. My mother's inside the house. I'll take you to my mother for now. When my father comes, he'll say to you: 'Do you want to stay with me? Well, if you do, you must hoe the soil on top of the mountain in an hour, then sow the seeds and reap the harvest, on one side straw and the other side grain.' After my father tells you this, you will travel to the mountain and say: 'Mountain, listen to what you must do now that I am up high. Within an hour everything must be sown and harvested.' Next, my father will say to you. 'Do you see this tree? You're to climb it and collect the little birds in the nest.' After he tells you this, you will climb to the top and say: 'Tree, now that I am up high, here is what you must do in name of the virtuous Bifara.' Now, do you see how large that beautiful oven is? Look carefully, because my father will have you heat it up. When it is very hot, my father will want you to clean it out, and you will say: 'Furnace, when I am inside, you're to become cold in the name of the virtuous Bifara.' Now go, and be on your guard."

She took the young man into the house, and her mother came and said,

“Ahh! I smell some human meat!  
When I find the man, he’ll be mine to eat.”

“Come! Come! Your nose is stuffed,” Bifara said to her, “and stop saying such terrible things, mother. I’ll tell you the truth. There is a young man who got lost and found his way here. Swear to me that you won’t eat him.”

Indeed, if she said “I swear,” the mother would not eat anyone. And, indeed, the mother swore and let the young man enter the house. In the meantime the father came and cried out,

“Ahh! I smell some human meat.  
When I find the man, he’ll be mine to eat.”

“Come! Come!” his wife said. “Your nose is stuffed because you’ve just returned from the woods. We haven’t let anyone enter the house.”

She gave her husband something to eat, and he kept saying:

“Ahh! I smell some human meat!  
When I find the man, he’ll be mine to eat.”

“Come! Now that you’re full, I have something to say to you. I want to tell you the truth. A young man happened to arrive here, and if you’ll swear that you won’t touch him, I’ll let you see him. Neither of us can eat him.”

“All right, have him come out.”

The prince came out, and the magician said, “Oh, what a nice smell! What’s your name?”

“Salvatore.”

“Ah! Salvatore! Now you must eat, for tomorrow morning I’ll tell you what you must do.”

After they gave him something to eat, they all went to bed, and they made up a bed for him. But Bifara did not lie down. Instead, she went over to him. Toward midnight the magician cried out: “Ahh! Salvatore, Salvatore!”

His old wife responded, “Ahh! Salvatore, Salvatore!”

Then their daughter responded, “And me, too, I want to eat him.”

When it turned day, the magician said, “Come, Salvatore, do you see that mountain? Within an hour you have to till the soil, sow the seeds, and reap the harvest with wheat and straw.”

The prince took whatever he needed from Bifara and went to the top of the mountain: “Mountain, now that I’m up high, here’s what you must do: within an hour you must be hoed and harvested.”

After everything had been done, he returned to the magician and his wife.

“Ahh!” the magician said, “You’re a talented man! Now, you see that tree?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Do you see how high it is?”

“I see.”

“You’ve got to climb to the top and take away a nest of little birds.”

Salvatore climbed to the top of the tree and said, “Oh tree, high as you are, make yourself low. Do it for the love that Bifara feels for you.”

When Salvatore returned with the nest, the magician said, “Ahh! You’re a talented man! Now here’s what you have to do next. You must heat up that oven over there and make it as hot as possible, and then you have to get inside and clean it out.”

“Yes, yes, my lord.”

The prince began to heat the oven and then said,

“Oh, oven, when I get inside you, you must turn freezing cold, and do it for the love that Bifara feels for you.”

Then he got into the oven and cleaned it out. When he came out, the magician said, “You’re certainly talented.”

After a few days the magician said that he had to depart and that he and his wife would be away for a week.

“You’re to stay with Bifara,” he told Salvatore.

When they left, Bifara said to Salvatore, “Now we must leave. My father can smell your scent from a distance of twelve miles, and my mother from ten miles.”

So, the two of them fled. After a week passed, the magician returned.

“Bifara!”

Bifara did not respond.

“Ahh! Traitor!” the magician said. “Now I’m going to eat you!”

He left his wife and began running after his daughter and Salvatore. When Bifara saw him, she turned to her lover and said, “Salvatore, my father’s coming! Here’s what we’ll do: I’ll turn myself into a gardener and you into broccoli.”

When the magician arrived, he found only the gardener and said, “Friend, have you seen a man and woman pass by here?”

“I’m just selling broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, and horseradish.”

So the magician turned around and went home.

“What did you find?” his wife asked.

“One of them became a gardener, and the other a piece of broccoli.”

“And why didn’t you break them in two!”

“I didn’t think of it.”

Now the wife pursued them with the intention of killing her daughter.

"Ahh! Salvatore," the maiden said, "my mother's coming. I'll turn myself into a river and you into a fish."

The woman arrived and instead of going by the river, she tried to catch the fish, but the fish could not be caught. So she cried out, "May you be cursed! Salvatore will forget you!"

And she returned home, and when the magician saw that she hadn't brought back their daughter, he set out again.

"Salvatore," Bifara said, "my father's after us. I'll turn into a church, and you become the sacristan."

When the magician arrived, he said, "Friend, did you see a man and a woman pass by here?"

"Mass will be at one in the afternoon, and if you come at two, there'll be another mass."

"May you be cursed," he said. "Salvatore will forget you forever!" Then he returned home.

"Oh Salvatore," Bifara said, "you saw how my father cursed me! He'll make you forget me!"

When they arrived near the city, the prince stopped and said he would get a coach from the palace to bring Bifara there in triumph.

"All right," she said to him. "I'll get up on that rock. Be on your guard, because once you're at home, you'll forget about me."

"No, I won't forget about you."

Salvatore went to the palace, and imagine the happiness of his mother. She kissed him all over, and the prince forgot all about Bifara. After a few days passed, Salvatore was going to get married. Bifara knew everything because she had magic powers. She took two talking dolls and brought them to the palace, right below Salvatore's window. Then she cried out: "Two talking dolls for sale! Two talking dolls for sale!"

When the prince heard her, he had her summoned up to his room.

"All right," said the prince, "we'd very much like to hear these talking dolls."

And the dolls began to recount everything that had happened to the prince and Bifara. Finally one of the dolls told all about Bifara's valor, and the prince remembered everything and recognized Bifara. He threw himself at her feet and embraced her. Instead of marrying his bride, he married Bifara.

They remained husband and wife  
And we still don't have a life.

*Told by Elisabetta Sanfratello at Vallelunga.*

## 16. THE THREE OBEDIENT CHILDREN

**I**'ve heard tell that there was once a rich gentleman who had three children, a son and two daughters. Just before his death, the father said to his son, "Here are some instructions that I want you to follow. When your two sisters grow up and are at the age to marry, you're to go outside and wait the entire morning until the first man passes by. This man will become the husband of your first sister, whether he is a peasant, an artisan, or a gentleman. It doesn't matter what his class is. The same holds true for your second sister."

When the oldest daughter reached marital age, her brother said, "Sister, you know that our father told me that the first man to pass by our house during the morning is to become your bridegroom. Tomorrow morning, to be exact, will be the day that you will marry."

The next day she went outside very early, and when a man passed by in bare feet, the brother said to him, "Friend, wait a moment."

"What do you wish, your lordship? Let me go. I've got to keep herding these pigs and move on."

"Come up here," the brother said. "Sit down. I've got some words to tell you in confidence. I'm going to give you my sister as your wife."

"What did you say, my lord? I can't marry your ladyship. I'm just a poor swineherd."

"It doesn't matter who you are," the brother responded. "It's my father's will: I must give my sister to the first man who passes by this morning, and you're that man."

The swineherd agreed, and after he married this sister, they went off to get on with their lives.

Another two years passed, and it was time for the other sister to get married. The brother stood outside as usual, and he called the first man who passed by and said to him, "Friend, come up here. I've got something to tell you."

"My lord, let me go on my way. I've got to prepare some snares and see if any birds have been caught."

"That's not important. Come up here for a moment. I want to tell you something."

The man let himself be persuaded and mounted the stairs.

"It's like this, my friend," the brother said. "I must give you my sister for your wife."

"My lord," the bird catcher responded, "how is this possible? I'm just a poor fowler, and I cannot marry your sister, who is a lady."

"I'm giving her to you," the brother said, "because this is the way it must be. It's my father's decree."

The fowler was persuaded, and he married the young lady. Then he took her, and they went off to get on with their lives.

"Now I want to get married," the brother said, and early the next morning he stood outside as usual, and an old washerwoman passed by. He called to her and said, "My friend, my friend, wait."

"What do you want?" the washerwoman responded.

"Come up here," the young man said. "I have something urgent to say to you."

"But what's so urgent? I've got to go and wash these clothes, and you say you have something *urgent* to tell me?" the washerwoman declared.

"I said come up here! I have something to tell you!"

The old woman stopped and hurled a curse at him: "You'll never marry unless it's the daughter of King Fierru!"

As she went away, he yelled, "Be gone, you evil old woman!"

But now he was compelled to find out the name of King Fierru's daughter! In short, he had to go and search for the daughter of King Fierru. So, one day he got on his horse, took some money, and departed without knowing where he was going. He traveled and traveled until he finally arrived at a lovely place and a large splendid palace with a beautiful gate. After he knocked, a servant came and brought the news of his arrival to his master. "My lord, there is a young man who has knocked at the door."

The owner of the palace looked down from the window and recognized his brother-in-law. Immediately he sent his servants to him, and one of them led the horse to the stable, and the other led the young man upstairs to his lord. His brother-in-law embraced him and welcomed him, and they sat down at the table to eat. While they were eating, the lord of the palace said, "Brother-in-law, to what do we owe the pleasure of your visit?"

The young man responded, "I'm searching for the daughter of King Fierru."

"Why is that?"

"Because an old woman said to me, 'you can never marry unless you marry the daughter of King Fierru!' So I must search for her and don't know where she is."

"I don't know anything about this maiden," the swineherd said. "But take care that you don't wear yourself out." And he gave him three pig bristles and said, "When you have need of me, just burn one of these bristles, and I'll appear before your eyes right away."

The young man took his leave and departed. He began to travel once more

and arrived at another palace that was larger than the previous one. He knocked at the door, and upstairs he found his other brother-in-law, the fowler, who had married his other sister.

"To what do we owe the pleasure of your visit?"

"I'm searching for the daughter of King Fierru."

"Oh, brother-in-law," the fowler responded. "I know nothing about her, but I can give you three bird feathers. If you have need of me, just burn one of the feathers, and I'll appear right before you."

The young man took his leave and departed. He began to travel and arrived at the city of King Fierru. Once he located the palace, he let it be known that he wanted to talk to the king. After the message reached the king, the young man mounted the stairs and presented himself.

"Your majesty," he said, "I'm a prince and want to have your daughter for my wife."

"Yes, of course," the king responded.

Then he took the young man in front of his palace and said to him, "You see this beautiful palace. If you can make one that equals mine before tomorrow morning, I'll give you my daughter for your bride."

The young man returned to the place where he was staying. He was very confused and thought about his brothers-in-law. So he burned a bristle and a feather, and all at once they appeared before him and said, "Brother-in-law, what do you need?"

"My friends, I've found the daughter of King of Fierru, but before her father will give her to me, he wants me to build a palace that is equal to his by tomorrow morning."

"Don't you worry," the swineherd and fowler responded. "Go to sleep. Everything will soon be ready."

When morning arrived and the palace was ready, the king went to his window and saw that the palace had been finished.

"Wonderful!" he cried out.

Then the prince came and said, "Your majesty, may I have my bride?"

"Not now," the king said to him. "It's not time yet." And he took the young man into a garden and said to him: "If you can make me a garden that equals this one, I'll give you my daughter."

After the king went away, the young man burned a feather and a bristle, and his brothers-in-law appeared and said, "What's the matter, friend?"

"The king won't give me his daughter unless I make a garden equal to this one by tomorrow morning."

Well, the swineherd and fowler made it in an instant, and it was filled with plants better than the ones in the king's garden. When they were done and

about to leave, they said to him, "When you need us, just burn the bristle and feather, and we'll come."

When morning arrived, the prince went to the king and said, "The garden is ready. Give me your daughter."

When the king saw the garden, he was frightened. However, he said, "Let's not rush into things. Come with me."

He showed him a messy warehouse filled with junk.

"Before you can have my daughter," he said, "you must clean up everything here by tomorrow morning."


After the king left him alone, the prince burned the feather and the bristle, and the swineherd and fowler appeared. He told them that the king wanted the warehouse to be emptied and cleaned by the next morning, and as usual they said to him, "Go to sleep. Tomorrow morning everything will be cleaned up."

The next day the warehouse had been emptied and cleaned. Then the prince went to the king and said, "The warehouse is ready. My lord, give me your daughter."

So now the king took a bunch of keys and began to open room after room until he came to his daughter. When the young man saw her, he was astonished because she was as beautiful as the sun. After they concluded the marriage agreement, he took her by her arm and brought her into the grand hall where they were married. The king took the crown and gave it to the prince and said, "From now on, you will be the king." And they lived happily ever after.

*Told by Vincenzo Midulla, miner in the sulfur mines of Casteltermini and collected by Guida, brother-in-law of G. Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

## 17. MARVIZIA

nce upon a time there was a prince, and he had a daughter he was crazy about. This girl didn't love the usual games or diversions. Instead, her one great delight was a pot with a plant in it. Each year the plant produced a single rose, which contained good seeds to eat. One day while the princess was playing, a green bird came down, sat on the rose, ate the seeds, and flew away. The girl burst into tears, tearing her hair and shouting, "Look at what happened! A green bird ate the rose's seeds! I want that green bird! I want that green bird!"

The prince would do anything for his daughter. So, he called together his councilors and told them about the green bird, and his wise men told him, "This bird is bound to return again. Just place a net there, and when the green bird lands on it, we'll catch him, and that's the end of it."

"That's a great plan," said the prince.

So, his servants placed the net next to the plant; the maiden hid; and down flew the green bird. But as the bird approached the net, it saw the princess hiding and shouted, "Whoa! Stop! I won't touch this net! Whoa! Stop! I won't touch this net!" and he soared away. Well, you can imagine the girl's distress at seeing the bird fly off.

"I want that green bird! I want that green bird!" she cried out.

Who was going to get the bird for her? Realizing that it would not be easy to find the bird, she had a pilgrim's suit made with two sea-shells on the chest, took a black staff, and left the palace by a secret stairway. She walked a long way, crossing plains and mountains, until finally she came to a village. At first she heard some shouts but didn't see anyone. Finally, she saw there were some savage folk who were shouting because they smelled human flesh. A gentleman came up to her and said, "My daughter, you'd better leave here, because if these folk catch sight of you, they'll make a quick end of you."

So the poor girl turned back to the fields. She came to open country, and when it grew dark, she found herself near a hermitage and went in. "God's greetings!" she said to the hermit who was there.

"I exorcise you in God's name!" came the answer.

"You don't have to exorcise me," she said, "because I am a baptized and christened soul just like yourself!"

"Then what are you doing in these woods?"

"Oh father, I am atoning for my sins. Could you give me a bite of bread and lodging for the night?"

"Yes, my child," and the hermit gave her a fine piece of bread. She ate it, swallowed some water, and fell asleep.

The next morning the hermit woke her, and they said their morning prayers. Then he gave her a little piece of wax and remarked, "Here, child, this will be useful for your needs."

The girl thanked him and took her leave. After a while she met another hermit.

"Long live Jesus and Mary," she said.

"I exorcise you in God's name," came the hermit's reply.

"You don't have to exorcise me," she said, "because I am baptized and christened just like yourself!"

"Well, my child, what are you doing in these woods at this hour amidst the wild animals and the black adders?"

"Oh father, I am atoning for my sins. Can you give me something to eat?"

The hermit gave her a crust of bread, a gulp of water, and good night. The next morning he woke her up, and they said their morning prayers. Then he gave her a little piece of string and commented, "Here, my child, this will be useful for your needs."

Traveling on, she came to a city with a palace all decked out in black for mourning.

"What's going on here?" she asked the sentinel.

"The queen's son has disappeared," he said, "and there's general mourning."

"Take your queen the message that there is a pilgrim here who needs lodging for the night."

"Let her come in," said the queen.

When the girl was inside, the queen asked her, "My girl, child that you are, how can you be journeying like this?"

"Your Highness, I committed a big sin, and I have to do seven years of penance."

"Then why not stay here with us?" the queen said.

"Oh no, your Highness, I must go on. But before leaving, I'd like to have a token to remember you by."

"Take whatever you like," said the queen, and she showed her all her jewels, diamonds, and precious stones. Seeing a ring with a single diamond stone, the girl said, "This is the token I would like."

"Oh no, my child," replied the queen, "take anything else you like, but this is the one thing I cannot give you. It is a remembrance of my son."

"But this is the very one I want."

"But this is the very one I cannot give you."

Well, it was a case of "you pull" and "I pull," and finally the girl said, "Your Highness, if you give me this, I promise that I will return."

"Well if that's the way it is, take it—but don't forget your promise."

So the pilgrim kept the ring and departed. (Now she had three tokens: the wax, the string, and the ring.) She walked and walked until she came to a mountain, where she met a little servant right at the bottom.

"Where are you heading, my fine little maiden?" he asked.

"I'm looking for a place to stay," she replied.

"Well, just go up this mountain until you come to a palace, and they'll give you a place to stay."

So up she climbed, reached the palace, and knocked on the door. When she

heard the voice of an ogre, she was terrified. The door opened, and a giant appeared, so tall you had to raise your head to look at him.

"Why have you come here, my girl?" he asked. "Do you realize that if Mamma-draga the ogress smells you, she'll eat you alive?"

At this point Mamma-draga herself came out. She was a tall, tall woman who lived by robbing and devouring people, sheep, goats, and cattle as if they were biscotti.

"You! What have you come here for?" the ogress demanded to know. "Go right away and put the kettle on and make me some soup!"

The giant intervened and said, "Let her stay for the night, the poor thing!"

"All right, we can let Marvizia stay," she said, calling her Marvizia because she looked like a little "marva," a mallow plant.<sup>40</sup>

The next morning, she said "Marvizia, polish all these copper utensils for me! I have to go out and get some food. When I come back, if this isn't all properly done, I'll melt you down for cooking fat!"

Well, the amount of copper was enormous, and for all Marvizia could do, there was no way she could polish it even in two days. Poor thing! When she heard these orders, she burst into tears and cried out, "How can I possibly get all this copper polished?"

In the midst of her tears and laments she looked out the window, and in the open field she saw the green bird. She turned to the giant (whose name was Ali) and said, "Ali, how can I manage to get all this copper polished the way Mamma-draga wants it?"

Ali went downstairs and out the door, and as soon as he found the green bird, he told him the problem.

"That's easy," said the bird. "Doesn't she have the little piece of wax? She simply has to throw it into the fire, and whatever she wants, she'll have."

Ali came back and told her this, and Marvizia threw the wax into the fire. All at once a host of giants appeared! One took hold of the casserole, another seized the kettle, another the frying pan, and in the wink of an eye they had all the copper equipment polished and hung neatly in place. When their work was done, all the giants just stood there, idle. What was Marvizia supposed to do now? So Ali went down to the bird and asked him, "What is Marvizia supposed to do with all those giants?"

"Well, doesn't she have the fire? Let her throw it into water, and those giants will vanish."

40 "Marva" is the Sicilian for "*malva*," mallow. Beginning here where she is named by the ogress, the heroine ceases to be called "the maiden" or "the pilgrim" and becomes Marvizia.

So Ali brought this news back to her, she threw the fire into the water, and the giants vanished.

When the ogress returned, she saw all the copper so clean that it sparkled. "Ha, Marvizia," she said, "it can't be that this is all your doing. But we'll discuss it tomorrow. For now," she said to her servants, "give her a shank of this animal to eat."

They gave her a shank of the ox that the ogress had killed. But poor Marvizia, how could she eat that? So she took hold of it and flung it out the window. And upon looking out the window, what did she see? There was the green bird, leaping in front of the window, amusing itself playing games.

The next morning the ogress's first words were, "Marvizia, you have to wash all the wool of all the mattresses—mine, Ali's, and the little servant's. Then wash all the mattress-linings and fill them back in again. I'm going out now. When I get back from getting my food, I'd better find them properly done. If they're not, I'll mince you into little tiny pieces."

And off she went, leaving Marvizia there crying amidst all her troubles. Ali came up and asked, "What's the matter?"

"And what do you think is the matter? Mamma-draga wants all the mattresses unstitched—all the wool washed, the linings too, and then all filled back in again."

Ali went to the green bird and told him the story, and the bird said, "Let her unwind the string she has, and whatever she wants to happen will happen."

When Ali came back and told her this, she unwound the string and an enormous number of mattress-makers appeared. Some unstitched the mattresses, others pulled out the wool, others beat it, and others washed it. And all those mattresses—I think there were a few hundred—were completely cleaned in the time it takes to tell it.

"And now what am I to do with all these mattress-makers?" asked Marvizia.

So Ali went to the green bird, who said, "Burn the string, and everything will be done."

So she burned the string, and all the mattress-makers disappeared. The ogress came back and said, "Are the mattresses all done, Marvizia?"

"All done."

"Ah, but this isn't your doing. Have no doubt about it, tomorrow I'll settle with you. For now, give Marvizia something to eat—give her this half a sheep."

Marvizia was given half a sheep, but she threw it out the window.

The next morning the ogress said, "Marvizia, you must take this piece of

cloth and make blouses for me. Have them sewn, washed, and ironed. If you don't do them right, I'll roast you this very same day."

That was all Marvizia needed! The poor little thing began crying and couldn't stop her tears. Ali, who was reading her thoughts, went down to the bird and told him everything.

"This is the final task, then there's nothing more I can do for her. Tell her to take the ring the queen gave her, pluck out the stone, and set it in the ray of the sun. That's all the help she needs."

When Marvizia did this, you should have seen what a gathering of fairy creatures came forth! One fairy wet the cloth, one cut it, one sewed—and in just the time it takes to tell it, the blouses were all sewn and ironed.

"And for the fairies to go away, what must I do?" asked Marvizia.

Ali went and asked the bird, who said that when the stone was set back in place, the fairies would vanish. When they were gone, the ogress came back with a dead bull on her back—it was her habit to snatch animals from everywhere.

"Marvizia!—Those shirts, are they ready?"

"Here they are!"

When the ogress saw them, she cried: "But this is certainly not your doing! Tomorrow I'll have you killed! You can count on it!"

The next morning the green bird came to the palace, and Mamma-draga said to him, "Bird you are and now you'll become man!" and the bird turned into a man.

"Why do you want Marvizia to die?" the man asked.

"You keep out of this," she answered. "Go downstairs and out the door!" Then she called Ali and told him, "Take Marvizia at once, and leave her among the herd of wild goats. That way I'll get her out of my sight."

So Ali put Marvizia on his back and began carrying her. On his way he met the green bird, who asked, "Where are you taking her?"

"I'm taking her to the herd."

"Well then, take this staff with you. When you reach the plain, strike with the staff, and lots of grass will appear. The goats will eat it and lose their hunger. Whenever you need grass, just use the staff."

Ali went off and did as he was told. When the goats sensed the smell of human flesh, they became uncontrollable. But Ali struck with the staff, and at once a high growth of grass sprouted, and the goats threw themselves on it and ate.

So Marvizia stayed among the goats, and every so often Ali went to look at her. After a week, the ogress went down intending to look at the herd. On the way, she noticed a goatherd with his daughter watching a few sheep and goats.

When they saw her, this maiden stood up and said, "Wait, Mamma-draga, I have something for you."

And then she did the following: she killed some sheep and goats, lit a great pile of firewood, roasted the animals, and brought them to the ogress, who greedily devoured them. Next, the girl brought her six big round loaves, and the ogress swallowed them too. Finally, the girl brought a large keg of wine followed by some ricotta and salted cheese, and of course, the ogress devoured everything. Just like the proverb says: "Whoever eats like a hungry bear could easily eat twelve more: all down the hatch, just like before!"

When the Mamma-draga had finished devouring all these tasty things, she said to the girl, "No one has ever shown me as much respect as you have. As a reward for this, I'll make you my son's bride." So she loaded her on her back, and instead of going on to Marvizia's herd, she climbed back up to the palace.

"Here, my son, I've brought you a wife!" and she set the shepherd girl in front of him. The green bird turned to her and said: "Mother, do you know what I was thinking? If Marvizia is still alive, we can have her brought here to be this woman's maid."

"What a good idea!" she replied, and they sent for Marvizia. But the minute the ogress went away, the green bird went and took the Ring of Command, and said: "Quickly make a torch appear with gunpowder and pellets inside. And when it explodes, may Mamma-draga's chambers go sailing through the air!"

Ali left, and returned with Marvizia. And now Mamma-draga the ogress performed the marriage of her son to the shepherd girl: "With these words I make you husband and wife!"

That night, it was to be Marvizia's task to hold up the lighted torch at the foot of the marriage bed. During the evening, the son entered Mamma-draga's room, seized both the Ring and the Book of Command, and hid them. Then the husband and wife retired for the night. Soon the shepherd-girl began to prod the young master, but he pretended not to understand. When the torch had melted almost all the way down, he said to her, "Now if you really love me, go and take hold of that torch just for a bit." The shepherd girl, mumbling and grumbling (because she already considered herself the lady of the house), got down from the bed and took hold of the torch. The torch had melted down to just the right spot, and BOOM! The ogress and the shepherd girl went flying, leaving Marvizia, Ali, and the young master by themselves.

When the ogress returned, she saw everything in ruins.

"Look how they tricked me!" she shouted. But Ali, Marvizia, and the young master had already made their escape. When they looked back, they saw that the ogress was pursuing close behind, eager to kill them. But

Marvizia took the Ring of Command, and it cried out, "Command me, command me!"

"I order a tower of bronze with us on top of it," she replied.

So, when the ogress arrived, all she could do was say, "You've escaped this time. I should have eaten you when I had the chance!" And she was biting herself in frustration.<sup>41</sup> But she didn't give up, and Marvizia had to use the ring again.

"Command me!"

"I order that this witch become a mass of gold, and that she sink twenty fathoms under the earth!"

Immediately the old woman was gone and turned into a statue of gold. Marvizia took the ring again.

"Command me, command me!"

"I order a grand palace, complete with servants, carriages, shuttered windows, fine costumes, and everything."

No sooner had she uttered these words than everything she named appeared. So now Marvizia dressed herself like the young queen that she was and went to the palace of the queen who was the true mother of the young master. She went up to the queen's quarters and immediately had them put an end to the state of mourning.

"What's this?" the queen asked. "Why are you ending the mourning?"

"Don't you recognize me, your Majesty?" she replied.

At this point the queen's maid came in and said, "I think I know this young queen—it's the same girl who was the pilgrim!"

"Ah, is it really you?"

"Indeed it is, your Majesty."

Then Marvizia informed the queen about everything that had happened. You can imagine the queen's delight to learn that her son was alive and had slipped out of the hands of the old ogress who had put him under a spell that turned him into her own son.

Now they got into a carriage and went to find the young king. As soon as they were together, they exchanged hugs and kisses, and he recounted for them all his misfortunes: how the ogress turned him into a green bird; how she devoured Christian folk like biscotti; and how she tried to have him marry a stinking shepherd girl. "If it weren't for Marvizia," he concluded, "I'd still be a green bird."

41 The text simply says "she was biting herself" (*si muzzicava*), without specifying where. Pitrè glosses "she was biting her hands;" but it is also possible that she is biting her lip, a common act signifying frustration.

Just then Marvizia took the ring in her hand.

"Command me! Command me!" it cried.

"My command is that a crew of giants appear and drag this sorceress under the earth!"

Immediately the giants appeared, took the massive gold statue, and hauled it up onto a huge wagon. They hitched up fifty pair of oxen and carried the statue all the way to the queen's city. There they held a huge celebration because the queen's son was found at last. The prince and Marvizia were wed, and afterward they had his brother-in-law Ali come too, and all together they set up house in the palace.

And so they lived on, in contentment and peace,

While we just sit here, picking our teeth.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina at Palermo.*

## 18. THE KING OF LOVE

Once, so they say, there lived a man, a farmer of wild horseradish, who had three girls. One day the youngest said to him, "Papa, will you take me with you to pick some horseradish plants?"

"Yes, my girl," and he took her with him. As soon as they arrived in the garden, they begin to pick the plants. The maiden caught sight of a beautiful plant some distance away and went there with her father to pull it out. Well, with "I pull" and "You pull" they managed to dig it up. All at once a Turk appeared and said, "How did you manage to open my master's doorway? Now you must enter so he can decide what your punishment will be."

And so they went below, fearing for their lives, and while they were sitting and waiting, a green bird appeared. They watched him go into a small tub of milk, and then one of water. Afterward he came out, dried himself, and turned into a handsome young man. Then he turned to the Turk and said, "What do these people want?"

"My Lord, I must tell you that this man and this woman have pulled out the plant and opened up the passage to your underground."

"How could we know that this was the entrance to your lordship's house?" responded the father. "My daughter saw a beautiful plant, and because she liked it, she pulled it up."

"All right, since this is the case," said the master, "your daughter can stay here and be my wife. Take this little bag of gold coins, and you can go.

Whenever you wish to see your daughter, you may come here and feel at home."

So the farmer took leave of his daughter and departed.

Once the master was alone with the girl, he said to her, "Rusidda (for that was her name), I want you to know that you are the mistress of this place," and he handed her the full set of keys. From that point on they lived in perfect happiness. One day, however, her two sisters decided to pay her a visit. They knocked and entered. The bird had not yet come back to take his usual bath in milk and water.

"This husband of yours, what is he like?" they asked her.

"I really couldn't say," she answered.

"But how could it be that you spend time with him without knowing who he is and who he isn't?"

"The reason I don't know is that he made me promise that I wouldn't try to find out who he is," Rusidda answered.

"Do you know what you should do? You should pretend that you cannot be happy with him unless he tells you who he is."

Rusidda let herself be seduced by the words of her sisters, and so when the bird returned, had his bath, and turned into a man, she put on an unhappy face for him.

"What's bothering you?" he asked.

"Nothing," she replied.

"It would be better if you told me."

She took a little time to allow him to persuade her, and then said, "If you want to know what's bothering me, it's that I want to know what your name is."

"Oh Rusidda, Rusidda, is that really what you want to know, my name?"

"Yes, I want to know it."

"Is that what you really, truly want?"

"Yes, that's what I want."

"All right, if that's really what you want, you must do the following. Take the gold basin and bowl out of the closet and set them on this chair. But Rusidda, before I even get up on this chair, tell me once more if you really want to know my name. And I warn you, this means trouble for you."

"Yes, that's what I want to know."

So he got up on the basin and wet his feet.

"Rusidda, do you still want to know my name?"

"Yes."

Now the bird had immersed himself so that the water reached his stomach.

"Rusidda, do you still want to know my name?"

“Yes.”

Now the water reached his mouth.

“Rusidda, do you still want to know my name?”

“Yes. Yes. Yes.”

“All right then, my name is: *The King of Love!*”

And upon saying that, he vanished. The basin vanished, the palace vanished, and Rusidda found herself out in the middle of a field with not a soul in sight to help her. She called for servants and stewards, but nobody answered. Finally she said, “Since he’s vanished, I shall have to go wandering through the world looking for him.”

By this time she had become pregnant. Nevertheless, she set out on foot, in an advanced state of pregnancy, and walked and walked. She went from one uninhabited plain to another, poor thing, so alone that she felt her heart tighten. At a loss for what to do, she cried out:

“Ah, King of Love,  
You said it and you did it:  
You disappeared from the golden basin,  
And who’s there forgiving and willing  
To take in a poor girl tonight?”<sup>42</sup>

And as she was repeating this, an ogress appeared and said to her, “Oh you miserable creature, how can you be so bold as to search for my nephew? Do you know why I won’t eat you on the spot? Well, it’s thanks to that little living soul you have in your belly! So come this way, and I’ll give you shelter for this night.”

So she took her in and put her to bed. The next morning she gave her a little piece of bread to eat. Then she explained to her, “We are seven sisters here, each of us is an ogress, and the worst of the lot is your mother-in-law. So be on your toes!”

The girl burst into tears, and when evening came, she set out again on foot. She walked until the sun set, and then again she cried out:

“Ah, King of Love,  
You said it and you did it:  
You disappeared from the golden basin,

42 “Ah! Re d’Amuri,  
Lu dicisti e lu facisti,  
’Nt ’on vacili d’oru mi spiristi,  
E la povera mischina  
Cu’ l’arricogghi di ccà a stasera?”

And who's there forgiving and willing  
To take in a poor girl tonight?"

As she was crying, another ogress appeared. She was the aunt of the Prince of Love. First she gave her a great scolding, but then she offered her shelter for the night in her house. The next morning she gave her a piece of bread and sent her away, telling her the same thing her sister had said. To make it brief, the poor girl walked this way for six more days, and each day an ogress told her the same thing. On the seventh day she was practically shedding tears of blood and cried even more loudly:

"Ah, King of Love,  
You said it and you did it:  
You disappeared from the golden basin,  
And who's there forgiving and willing  
To take in a poor girl tonight?"

Now her sister-in-law appeared, the King of Love's own sister, and she said to her, "Rusidda, Rusidda, since my mother isn't here, come on up."

She lowered her long braids and had her climb up. Once she had given her something to eat, she said, "Listen, my mother's about to come. She will eat this kneading-trough full of pasta and this entire pig with a whole furnace-load of bread. After that she will drink a whole barrel full of wine. When she is halfway through her meal, you must take her left breast and throw it behind her right side and throw her right breast behind her left side. Then you must grab the ends of her nipples and squeeze so hard she almost dies. When she cries '*Let go of me, for the love of my son, the King of Spain!*' don't let go. Instead, squeeze even harder. When she cries '*Let go of me, for the love of my daughter Rusidda,*'<sup>43</sup> don't let go. Then she will shout, '*Let go of me, for the love of my daughter Catarina!*' but don't you let go. At last, when she can stand it no longer, she will say '*Let go of me, for the love of my son, The King of Love!*'—at that point let go of her. And now let me hide you underneath this cup, since my mother is about to arrive."

So she took her and hid her under a large cup. Meanwhile Catarina felt a gust of wind, which meant her mother was coming. Sure enough, Mamma-draga the ogress was under the window and began shouting; "Catarina, let down your braids!" So her daughter looked out the window, loosened her braids, and helped her climb up. As the Mamma-draga entered she said, "Aha!

43 Not to be confused with the protagonist Rusidda; this is a very common Sicilian name.

I smell the scent of human meat,  
If I ever find her, she's mine to eat!"

"Oh no, mother, it's because your nostrils are still full of the smell of all the children you have eaten that you imagine that smell is in here. Relax and have your dinner."

Halfway through her meal, Catarina lifted up the cup and let Rusidda out. Rusidda grabbed the ends of Mamma-draga's nipples and squeezed. Feeling herself being squeezed like that, the ogress lashed out against her children, but there was nothing she could do. She simply couldn't move, and so she shouted: "Let go of me, for the love of my son the King of Spain! . . . Let go of me, for the love of my daughter Rusidda! . . . Let go of me, for the love of my daughter Catarina! . . . Let go of me, for the love of my son the King of Love!" And when she said these last words, Rusidda, who had kept squeezing her, finally let go.

Once she was released, the ogress wanted to devour Rusidda, but her children said to her, "You awful mother! If you devour this innocent child, we'll all run off and leave you completely by yourself!"

"Well if that's the case," she said, "I'm going to write a letter, and you, Rusidda, have to take it to my godmother."

The poor thing, Rusidda, when she found herself with this letter, felt uncertain as to what to do. So she descended into the plain and called out:

"Ah, King of Love,  
You said it and you did it:  
You disappeared from the golden basin,  
And who's there forgiving and willing  
To take in a poor girl tonight?"

All at once the King of Love appeared to her and said, "Now do you see? Your own curiosity has brought you to this point."

When the poor girl saw him, she begged his pardon for what she had done, and he took pity and said, "All right, listen to what you must do. You must walk from here until you come to a river of blood. Bend down and scoop up a handful and say, '*What beautiful crystal-clear water! I've never tasted water like this!*' Then you'll come to a garden with a huge amount of fruit. Pick one or two of these, eat them, and say: '*Oh what beautiful pears! Pears like this I've never eaten before!*' As you go on further, you'll come to an oven. Night and day this oven takes in and turns out loaf upon loaf of bread, but nobody ever buys two cents' worth. When you arrive, you must say, '*Oh what beautiful bread! Bread like this I've never eaten before!*' and eat some of it. Further ahead

you'll see a doorway, where you'll find two famished dogs. Give them a piece of that bread to eat. Then you'll see an entrance that's all dirty and filled with cobwebs. Take a broom and sweep it all clean. Then go up the stairs, and you'll meet two giants, each with a piece of meat at his side, all dirty. Take a brush and clean them off. As you enter the house, you'll find a razor, a scissors, and a knife. Find something to sharpen them with. Once you've done that, you can go in and hand over the letter to my mother's godmother. But when she tries to get you into the room, snatch up the little casket that you'll see on the table and run away immediately. Make certain you do all the things I've said. If not, you'll pay with your life!"

Rusidda departed, and when she came to the two rivers, she scooped up some water and drank it and said, "What beautiful, crystal-clear water! I've never tasted water like this!" Then she passed the garden and picked the fruit. In short, she completed all the tasks the King of Love had told her to do. When she went upstairs to the Mamma-draga, she gave her the letter. While that creature was reading it, she snatched the little casket and took off at a run. As soon as the ogress finished reading, she cried out, "Rusidda! Rusidda!" But Rusidda didn't answer. Realizing she had been tricked, the ogress called out, "Scissors, razor, knife, cut her!"

But they answered, "How long have we been scissors, razor, and knife, and you never bothered to clean us? Rusidda came along and gave us a nice cleaning."

In rage, the Mamma-draga shouted, "Stairway, swallow her!"

"How long have I been a stairway, and you've never bothered to clean me? Along came this girl, and she cleaned me."

Infuriated, the Mamma-draga called out, "Giants, stab her!"

"How long have we been giants, and you've never bothered to sweep away our dirt? Along came this girl, and she swept away our dirt."

"Doorway, swallow her!"

"How long have I been your doorway, and you've never bothered to sweep me? Along came this girl, and she swept me."

"Dogs, devour her!"

"How long have we been your dogs, and you've never bothered to give us a scrap of bread? Along came this girl, and she gave us bread."

"Oven, roast her!"

"How long have I been an oven, and you've never wanted my bread? Along came this girl, and she ate some of my bread."

"Tree, stick her!"

"How long have I been a tree, and you've never picked my fruit? Along came this girl, and she picked some fruit."

“River of mud and river of blood, drown her!”

“And how long have we been river of mud and river of blood, and you’ve never sampled our water? Along came this girl, and she drank from us.”

Meanwhile, Rusidda continued her journey. Finally she couldn’t resist the curiosity of seeing what was inside that little casket. She opened it, and out came a company of little dolls, dancing, singing, and playing music. She enjoyed herself for quite some time with these delights, and the dolls had no wish to go back inside the casket. When night fell, and it grew dark, she called out:

“Ah, King of Love,  
You said it and you did it:  
You disappeared from the golden basin,  
And who’s there forgiving and willing  
To take in this poor girl tonight?”

Now the King of Love himself appeared and said to her, “Ah, so you fell victim to curiosity!<sup>44</sup> As for you little dolls, I order you back inside at once!”

All the dolls jumped back into the box, and Rusidda continued on her way. Once she reached the Mamma-draga’s window, she called to her sisters-in-law, Catarina and Rusidda, who lowered their braids so she could climb up. When the Mamma-draga saw her, she said, “Ah, this success is not your own doing! It comes from my son, the King of Love.”

Now the ogress really wanted to eat her, but her daughters restrained her.

“You evil thing! She brought you the little casket, so how can you want to eat her?” they protested.

“All right; but now she must prepare to marry my son, the King of Love. Girl, take these six mattresses and fill them up for me with bird feathers!”

Rusidda picked up the mattress linings, and once outside, she began walking and calling,

“Ah, King of Love,  
You said it and you did it:  
You disappeared from the golden basin,  
And who’s there forgiving and willing  
To take in this poor girl tonight?”

All at once he appeared, and she told him the whole story. With a loud whistle the King of Love summoned the King of Birds.

<sup>44</sup> Lit., “Curiosity eats your eyes,” an idiomatic expression that seems strange in English.

“Hurry! Have all your birds come here, shed their feathers, and use them to stuff these six mattresses!”

The birds filled the six mattresses, and he ordered them to bring them to his mother’s house. When the Mamma-draga saw the six beautifully filled mattresses, she said, “Ah, this gift didn’t come from you. It came from my son, the King of Love.”

But her daughters said, “What does it matter who it came from, as long as you got your mattresses?”

So the Mamma-draga made up her son’s bed, placing the six mattresses on top of it. The next evening she decided to have him marry the daughter of the King of Portugal. So she called Rusidda and said, “Listen: my son, the King of Love, is getting married, and it’s our custom in marriages to have someone at hand kneeling with two lit torches. So it’s your job to hold these lit torches in front of my son’s bed.”

When the royal couple had gone to bed, it was almost an hour short of midnight. The King of Love said to his bride, “Do you see how weary Rusidda is because of her pregnancy? She can hardly stay on her knees another minute. Why don’t you get up just for a bit and take the torches yourself a moment, and let the poor creature lie down?”

The princess got up and let Rusidda lie down. But the moment the princess had the torches in her hand, the earth opened up and swallowed her, and the King of Love remained happily in bed next to Rusidda.

The next morning Mamma-draga went there, believing that Rusidda was dead. But when she saw her there in the bed, she said, “Oh you wicked creature, sleeping there next to my son! And pregnant too! My revenge is this: you will not be able to give birth until I take my hands off my head!”

And she held her hands on top of her head.

When Rusidda began suffering her labor pains, the King of Love was at a loss. So what did he do? He had a catafalque prepared and lay down on it like someone who had died. Then he had them ring all the bells for the death knell and ordered all the people go about saying, “The King of Love has died!”

The hubbub reached his mother’s window. When she heard it, she asked, “What’s the meaning of all this noise?”

Her daughters answered, “What do you think it is? Our brother is dead because of you!”

When the Mamma-draga heard this, she lifted her hands from her head and ran about and cried, “Oh my son, how did he die?”

And as she lifted her hands from her head, Rusidda gave birth. The King of Love got up from his bed and said to her, “Mother, you have my thanks because Rusidda has given birth.”

When Mamma-draga heard this, she had a heart attack and died on the spot. The King of Love went to get his wife, and afterward he formed a new household with his sisters, and they lived on, happy and content.

Twiddle dee, twiddle da, now look at me,  
My finger's pointing . . . who will it be?<sup>45</sup>

*Told by the blind Giovanni Patuano at Palermo.*

## 19. THE SLAVE

Once upon a time there was a peasant who made his living by gathering broccoli, and he had three daughters. This poor man kept searching for broccoli but could not even find a single leaf. So, one day he said to his daughter Rosetta, "Do you want to come with me to look for broccoli? Perhaps I'll find some with you."

"Yes, father, I'll come with you."

They spent some time in the countryside, but they didn't find even a tuft of grass. At a certain point Rosetta noticed that there was a beautiful mushroom and went to pull it out of the ground. But it was impossible because it had very strong roots so that she had to call her father. They pulled and pulled and soon became tired. After an hour they managed to tear out the mushroom, and a slave appeared.

"What are you doing here, you two?" the slave asked.

"What do you mean! We've been trying to pull out this mushroom for an hour and couldn't manage to do it until now."

"And you," the slave said to the father, "how about leaving this beautiful maiden with me? If she stays, she'll become a queen. Beneath this ground I have a magnificent palace."

The poor father responded, "Why ask me? You should be asking her. And you, my daughter, do you want to stay with this man?"

"Yes, father."

The slave gave the father a purse filled with money and bade him farewell, and as he was departing, Rosetta said, "Father, greet my sisters for me."

45 Croccu di ccà e croccu di ddà  
L'anca di . . . appizzata ddà.

As Pitre's note explains, this is a formula for naming a member of the audience to tell the next story.

“What!” the slave said to Rosetta, “you have some other sisters? How many do you have?”

“Two,” Rosetta replied.

“Well then,” the slave said to the father, “have the sisters come to this hole whenever they want to see Rosetta.”

The broccoli gatherer returned home and told his wife what had happened over bread and wine.

Rosetta, who disappeared with the slave, found herself in a subterranean palace where the rooms were filled with gold and silver coins and jewels.

“Listen to what I have to say to you,” the slave said. “If you are loyal to me and do what I tell you to do, all these riches will be yours.”

“I’ll do whatever you tell me to do,” Rosetta said.

They ate and drank, and after three days the slave said, “Well then, I’m going to depart, and I’ll be gone for a month. I’m going to leave this hand of fresh flesh. You must eat it while I’m gone. If you don’t do it, you’ll be in a lot of trouble!”

The poor maiden took the hand and promised to eat it. Then the slave left. After his departure Rosetta began to look at the hand which horrified her, and she said,

“My God! How am I supposed to eat this hand of fresh flesh?”

So what did she do? She took the hand, ground it down in a mortar, and threw it into the toilet. Later, the slave returned and asked,

“Rosetta, did you eat the hand?”

“Yes, I ate it.”

The slave turned around and cried out, “Hand, my little hand, where are you?”

“In the toilet,” the hand responded.

“Ah, well then,” he said to Rosetta, “you didn’t eat the hand! Take this!”

And with one hard blow he knocked off her head and threw it into a room with a bunch of other heads.

After a while the father showed up at the hole while gathering broccoli in the woods. Then the slave appeared and said, “Your daughter is in good health. She’s living in a palace made of gold and silver, but she’d like one of her sisters to keep her company.”

“Yes, my lord, tomorrow I’ll bring you my daughter Caterina.”

“Take this,” the slave said and gave him a purse filled with money.

The father returned home and told his wife everything, including the news about Rosetta. Then he took Caterina with him, and the slave played the same trick. When she arrived in the countryside, she went down the magic hole. After a while the slave gave her the hand, and the same thing happened. Poor

Caterina didn't know what to do, and she lost her life just like her sister. The peasant returned to the same spot, and the slave, who was worse than the devil as a seducer, told him that Rosetta and Caterina wanted the other sister, whose name was Antonia.

"Yes, my lord," the father responded, and the next day he brought him Antonia.

But Antonia was seven thousand times cleverer than her sisters. When the slave, as usual, told her about the hand and that he had to go away, she began to think about how she could get out of this great mess. And what did she do? She took the hand, ground it down in the mortar, and she put it on her stomach like some plaster. When the slave returned, he asked, "Where's the hand?"

"In my stomach."

The slave went and looked in the toilet and couldn't find it. So he became convinced that Antonia had eaten it, and he opened his heart to her about all his secrets. Then he gave her the keys to all the rooms and showed her a vast amount of treasures and wealth that were a marvel to behold.

One time, when she was alone, Antonia went all over the palace. But when she entered a certain room, what did she see? She saw many fresh corpses thrown on the ground, fresh corpses of kings, emperors, princes, princesses and other people. Some were missing their heads, some their feet, some their arms. And that's nothing. Who do you think she saw among all these people? Rosetta and Caterina without heads,

"Ahh! My sisters, how is it that I've lost you!"

On the ground there was a pot with something inside it. Antonia took a brush, dipped it inside, and then brushed Caterina's neck with it. All at once Caterina came back to life and embraced Antonia, who then did the same thing with Rosetta, who came back to life. They kissed and embraced, and it was a tender scene to see. Now Antonia summoned her courage, and she brought all the dead people back to life, one after the other. These dead people had lost their lives at the hands of the slave just like the two daughters of the broccoli gather. What was astonishing, however, was that they had not rotted. Rather, their bodies had remained fresh, and it's impossible to recount or tell how much they rejoiced when they were returned to life! They embraced and kept hugging Antonia. One person wanted to take her for his daughter, another for his mother, another for his wife, and another wanted to give her his realm. Meanwhile time passed, and everyone agreed that Antonia should become the wife of the Prince of Portugal, and in fact, this is what happened.

But let us leave them and return to the slave. When he returned and found

that all the rooms had been opened, the dead had been revived, and most of his money had been taken, he stood there dumbstruck. He wanted to do something, but what could he do? There was no way to remedy the situation. Finally, the slave, who was a sorcerer, thought up a devious plan: he had himself locked inside a beautiful cabinet and carried to Portugal. The man who brought the cabinet there took it to the royal palace and cried out:

“What a beautiful cabinet for sale? Who wants to buy this cabinet?”

Just at that moment the prince was standing at the window with the princess, and the prince said, “Antonia, let’s buy that beautiful cabinet.”

Antonia stood listening to her heart as if it were talking and didn’t say no or yes. So the prince bought it and had it carried carefully into their room. When night arrived, the slave unlocked the cabinet from inside with a key and came out into the room of the princess to cast a magic spell on her. Antonia, who was half asleep, cried out, “Help! Help!”

The servants came running to the room, but they didn’t see anyone. After they left and some time passed, she heard some noise again and cried out, “Help! Help!”


But the servants didn’t see anyone because the slave didn’t move and seemed to be a statue. The third time, however, Antonia noticed the slave’s movements, and she cried out, “Help, Help!”

This time he was captured and bound from head to toe and thrown into an iron cage. Then she sent news to all the nobles of Portugal, who came to torture the slave and avenge themselves for all the suffering caused by this miserable dog. They did this until the slave was dead. Then they held a grand celebration.

And they remained happy and in peace  
while we sit here and pick our teeth.

*Told by a niece of the blind Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 20. THE OLD WOMAN OF THE GARDEN

nce upon a time there was a cabbage garden. The crops each year were becoming more and more scarce, and when two women began talking, one of them said:

“My friend, let’s go and pick some cabbages.”

“How are we to know whether anyone’s there?” said the other.

“All right. I’ll go and see if someone’s keeping guard,” the neighbor said.

She went and looked.

“There’s no one. Let’s go!”

They entered the garden, gathered two good batches of cabbage, and left. Then they cheerfully ate the cabbages. The next morning they returned, but one of the women was afraid that the gardener would be there. However, since they didn’t see anybody, they entered. Once again they gathered two good batches of cabbage and ate them all.

Now let’s leave them eating the cabbages and turn to the old woman who owned the garden. When she went to her garden, she cried out: “Jesus! Some one’s eaten my cabbages. Well, I’m going to take care of this . . . I’ll get a dog and tie him to the gate at the entrance. When the thieves come, the dog will know what to do.”

All right, let’s leave the old woman who fetched a dog to guard the garden and return to the two women. One of them said to the other:

“Let’s go and pick some cabbages.”

“No, my friend, there’s a dog now.”

“Not a problem! We’ll buy some dry bread with our money and feed it to the dog. Then we can do whatever we want.”

So they bought some bread, and before the dog could bark, they threw it some pieces. As soon as the dog became silent, they gathered the cabbages and left. Later on, the old woman arrived, and when she saw the damage, she cried out, “Ahh! So, you let them gather the cabbages! You’re really not a good guard dog. Out you go!”

And so the old woman now took a cat to guard the garden and hid in the house, and as soon as the cat screeched *meow! meow!* she would grab the thieves by their throats.

The next day one of the women said, “Friend, let’s go and pick some cabbages.”

“No. There’s a guard, and this means trouble for us.”

“I don’t think so. Let’s go.”

When they saw the cat, they bought some fish, and before the cat could *meow*, they threw it some fish, and the cat didn’t utter a sound. The women gathered some cabbage and left. When the cat finished eating the fish, it went *meow, meow!* The old woman came running but didn’t see anyone. So she picked up the cat and cut off its head. Then she said, “Now I’m going to have the cock keep guard, and when it crows, I’ll come running and kill those thieves.”

The next day the two women began talking with one another.

“Let’s go and pick some cabbage.”

“No, my friend, there’s the cock.”

"Doesn't matter," her friend said. "We'll take some grain with us and throw it to the cock so it won't cry out."

And this is what they did. While the cock ate the grain, they picked the cabbages and left. When the cock finished eating the grain, it crowed: "Cock-a-doodle-do!" So the old woman came running and saw that more cabbages had been stolen. So she picked up the cock, wrung its neck, and ate it. Then she called a peasant and said, "I want you to dig a hole just my size."

Afterward she hid herself in the long hole, but one of her ears stuck outside. The next morning the women came to the garden and didn't see a soul. The old woman had asked the peasant to dig the hole along the path that the women would have to pass, and when they came by, they didn't notice a thing. They passed the hole and collected some cabbages, and on their return, the woman who was pregnant, looked at the ground and saw a mushroom which was actually the old woman's ear.

"Friend, look at this beautiful mushroom!"

She knelt down and tugged at it. She pulled and pulled, and finally, she yanked out the old woman with all her might.

"Ahh!" the old woman said. "You're the ones who've been picking my cabbage! Just wait and see what I'm going to do to you!"

She grabbed hold of the pregnant woman, while the other scampered away as fast as her legs could carry her.

"Now I'm going to eat you alive!" the old woman said to the pregnant woman whom she had in her clutches.

"No! Listen to me! When I give birth, and my child is sixteen years old, I promise that, whether boy or girl, I'll send the child to you, and I'll keep my promise."

"All right," the old woman said. "Pick all the cabbages you want, and then leave. But remember the promise you've made."

The poor woman was more dead than alive when she returned home.

"Ah, friend," she said to her neighbor. "You managed to escape, and I'm still in trouble. I promised the old woman that I'd give her my first-born when the child turns sixteen."

"And what do you want me to do?"

After two months, the Lord blessed the pregnant woman with a baby girl.

"Ahh, my daughter!" she said to the baby. "I'll raise you, give you my breast, but then someone is going to eat you!"

And the poor mother wept. When the girl turned sixteen, she went out to buy some oil for her mother. The old woman saw her and said, "Whose daughter are you, my girl?"

"My mother's name is Sabedda,"<sup>46</sup> she replied.

"Well, tell your mother to remember her promise. You've become a beautiful maiden. You're nice and tasty," she said as she caressed her. "Here, take some of these figs and bring them to your mother."

The maiden went to her mother and told her what had happened.

"The old woman told me to remind you of your promise."

"Why did I promise her?!" the mother began to cry.

"Why are you crying, mamma?"

But her mother said nothing. After weeping for some time, she said to her daughter, "If you meet the old woman, you're to say: 'She's still too young . . . .'"

The next evening the maiden went again to get some oil and met the old woman who did the same thing as she had done the day before.

Meanwhile her mother thought, "It's now or in the course of two years that I'll have to separate from my daughter." So she said to her daughter, "If you meet the old woman, tell her, 'When you see her, take her, and the promise is kept.'"

Then the old woman soon appeared and asked, "What did your mother say?"

"When you see her, take her."

"Well then, come with your grandma, for I'm going to give you many things."

She took the maiden with her, and when they arrived at the old woman's house, she locked the maiden in a closet and said, "Eat whatever's there."

After a fair amount of time had passed, the old woman said, "I want to see if you've gotten fatter."

There was a little hole in the door.

"Show me, little one. Stick out your finger."

The maiden was clever. A mouse had come by, and she had cut off its tail and showed it to the old woman.

"Ahh! How thin you are, my daughter. You've got to eat for your grandma. You're so thin, and you've got to eat."

Some more time passed.

"Come out, my daughter, so I can see you."

The maiden came out.

"Ahh! You've become nice and fat. Let's go and knead some bread."

46 Here the storyteller, Elisabetta (Sabedda) Sanfratello, interjects that she has given the mother in the story her own name, as a name "for example," and then feels compelled to add that, of course, she herself was not present for the actions of the story.

“Yes, grandma. I know how to do it.”

When they finished kneading the bread, the old woman had her heat up the oven.

“Light it for your grandma.”

The maiden began to clear it out to heat the oven.

“Come on. Do it for grandma,” the old woman said. “Let’s put the bread in the oven.”

“But, grandma, I don’t know how to put the bread into the oven. I know how to do everything else, but I don’t know how to put the bread into the oven.”

“Well then,” said the old woman, “I’ll put the bread into the oven. You just have to pass it to me.”

The maiden took the bread and gave it to the old woman who said, “Pick up the iron slab that closes the oven.”

“But grandma, I don’t have the strength to pick up the slab.”

“Well then, I’ll pick it up.”

When the old woman kneeled down, the maiden grabbed her from behind and shoved her into the oven. Then she picked up the slab and used it to close the oven.

“Now there’s nothing more to do here. So I’ll find out where my mother is.”

As she went outside, a neighbor saw her.

“Well, you’re alive?!”

“Why, should I be dead? Now, listen to what I’m going to tell you. I want you to look for my mother. I want to see her.”

The neighbor went and called her mother, who went to the old woman’s house. When her daughter told her everything that had happened, she became very happy, and they took charge of everything in the house.

They remained happy and content

While we still don’t have a cent.

*Told by Elisabetta (Sabedda) Sanfratello in Vallelunga.*

## 21. THE MARRIAGE OF A QUEEN WITH A ROBBER

**I**’ve heard tell that there was once a king and a queen who had a daughter they wanted to marry off. The king issued a proclamation calling for all the monarchs to gather in his palace. And they all came. The king went

arm in arm with his daughter to see if one of the men might please her as husband. She inspected all of them with her father, and not one of them pleased her. Consequently they all left. Then the king issued another proclamation calling for all the princes to come together. They came, and the king had his daughter review them. Now we must say in advance that there was great entertainment on these two occasions, yet none of the princes pleased the king's daughter. More proclamations, and more barons, cavaliers, and professors came. After she saw them, none of them pleased her. Finally, she chose a professor from a foreign country.

"My father, that one is to be my husband," the princess said to the king right away.

Her father consented and had them married. Soon after the wedding the husband decided to depart and brought his wife to her father and mother so that she could say farewell to them. Then she left with a troop of soldiers to accompany her. During the journey the soldiers said to her lord and master, "Excellency, let's eat."

"We don't eat at this time of day!"

After they had traveled a bit further, they said the same thing and received the same response: "We don't eat at this time of day."

Because of their great hunger, the soldiers began to bite on stones, and after a while they abandoned the queen with her husband who finally arrived at the place designated by the husband. Once there he knocked three times with a rod, and a door to a grotto opened.

"Go inside," the husband said to his wife.

"I'm afraid," the young woman responded.

"Enter, or I'll kill you!"

Finally, she walked into a room completely filled with dead bodies on the ground. He made her pile the bodies, and since there was no way that she could oppose him, she decided somehow she had to return to her father's country. Then she remembered that an aunt had given her a piece of cloth that she had stored in a chest of drawers. So she opened the chest, and the chest spoke to her and said, "I'm at your command!"

"Well, I command you to bring me back home to my father and my mother," she responded.

No sooner did she say these words than a white dove came forth, and the dove said, "I'm at your command. Do what you wish. But I advise you to write a letter to your father, and I'll carry it to him in my beak."

She did as the bird said.

The dove carried the letter away and placed it on the bedside table of the father, who read it immediately while the bird waited. He responded by

writing: "My daughter, try to find out how to escape by questioning your husband, and then you can make use of the information."

The dove instantly carried the letter to the young queen. When her husband came to her, she said, "Oh, my husband, you're so yellow! You resemble a dead person," and she purposely said things to get him to reveal anything and everything and to ask him what it would take to get out of there. She told him about a dream and said, "Do you know that I actually dreamed that I left here?"

"Oh, if you want to get out of here, you'll have to do many things. Most of all you'll need a seventh son Settimo."<sup>47</sup>

After the dove heard these words, it flew immediately to tell the father, and he, in turn, wrote to his daughter and informed her that he was sending his troops in search of a seventh-born son. As they were searching, they passed a garden, and in this garden there was a washerwoman who was weaving. When she saw the soldiers, she became scared and said to herself, "Now they will rob me of my garments." And she hurriedly wrapped the clothes out of fear. The soldiers said to the washerwoman, "Don't be afraid. We don't want to rob you. We want to know truly where we can find a seventh-born son."

"Oh, who knew what I was thinking?" the washerwoman said. "I have a son who is my seventh born."

"Then we're going to take him with us."

The washerwoman handed him over to them, and the soldiers said, "Come with us to free the princess."

The seventh son said, "You can depend on me for anything," and they went to the princess's prison. Settimo knocked on the door three times, and the grotto opened. The princess was ready. After she dressed herself, she went away with all the soldiers.

While they were on their way, they noticed an old woman in a garden. They greeted her and continued to walk. Later on the scoundrel of a husband returned to the grotto and couldn't find the queen.

"I've been tricked! Betrayed!" he said to himself and began pursuing the queen. By chance he looked into the garden and saw the old woman pretending to be deaf.

"Perhaps you've seen a king and a queen with a troop of soldiers pass by here?" he asked.

The old woman responded in exactly the opposite way to what the scoundrel asked because she was deaf. "Do you want cabbage, broccoli, or lettuce?"

47 Magic powers were attributed to the seventh son.

She already began to gather them. But when the scoundrel saw that she wanted to pay her respect with these greens, he said, "I don't want these greens. I asked you whether you happened to see a king and queen with soldiers pass by here."

She responded, "What do you want, your lordship? Celery, onions, or cucumbers?" And she went to gather them.

"I'm not looking for these things," he said. "A plague on what you're gathering! Did you see a princess with a king and troops?"

"Do you want to hear the mass? I'll play it for you." And the old woman began to play, but the thief was disconcerted. He went on his way and left her there alone.

At this moment Settimo arrived at the royal palace. The princess went directly to the king's chambers. Indeed, the king had arranged a new marriage for her with the King of Siberia, and Settimo was present at it. However, the scoundrel was secretly plotting something and learned the art of making picture frames so that he could hide within them and be carried from place to place. So he went from country to country and to different places extremely far away while selling the pictures. Finally he arrived in the country where the queen was living and hired a man to sell a picture with him inside. The queen was sitting at her window and called to this man selling pictures. She looked at the pictures and took one of them to place at the head of her bed.

"What have you bought, my queen?" her husband asked her.

"I've bought a painting to place at the top of my bed."

She gave money to the man who sold the picture, and he went away. The painting was enclosed by three padlocks. That evening when the king and queen were laying at rest, the scoundrel managed to get out of the picture frame, wrote a note, and placed it under the pillow of the king. Later, when the king was sleeping, the robber, who was back in the picture frame, opened a padlock and made some noise. The queen was frightened and began to call her husband and to pinch him, but he couldn't wake up due to the note that had been enchanted. He didn't even feel one pinch. The robber opened the second padlock, and the king did not hear a thing. The queen was scared to death. Finally, the robber opened the third padlock, and this way he was able to get out of the painting and said, "You're in my hands. Get up, and fetch the scissors so I can cut off your hair."

As the queen ran to fetch the scissors, she pulled the king's hand and knocked him to the ground causing the note to fall from under the pillow. The king got up, sounded the trumpet, and gathered his soldiers who killed the robber. That's how everything ended.

The tale's been written, the tale's been read, now tell one of yours, because mine's been said.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 22. THE SEVEN ROBBERS

**T**his wonderful story's been told time and again.

Once upon a time there was a mother with seven daughters who were weavers. One day it so happened that seven robbers knocked at the door.

"Old woman, old woman?"

"Who is it?"

"It's us."

And the old woman opened the door.

"We've come to ask for a maiden."

"And why do you want her?"

"Because our wives don't have a girl, and they need one."

"Teresa," the mother said, "do you want to go with them?"

"Yes, mother."

The robbers gave the old woman a little sack of money, and they took the maiden away to their home, and that evening, after having eaten, they gave her all the keys and told her that there was one room that she was not to open. The next morning, after they left, Teresa set the rooms in order, ate, and walked around the house a little. When she found the key to the locked room, she said to herself, "Oh! Now I'd like to see what's inside."

As she opened the door, she remained half inside and half outside and died on the spot. When the robbers returned home, they began to call her, but she didn't respond. So they searched for her and found her dead.

"There were a hundred, and now there's a hundred and one," said one of the robbers. "We have to return to the old woman."

So they departed and went to Teresa's mother.

"My sons, you've returned?"

"Since things aren't working out well with your daughter, we want another sister."

"Peppa," the mother said to her second daughter, "do you want to go and see your sister?"

"I'll go, mamma."

The robbers took the maiden and gave the mother another small sack of money.

"This is for you. Your daughter sent it to you."

And they took Peppa to their home. As soon as she arrived, she didn't ask where her sister was or anything else. She took the keys for safekeeping and noticed that the one to the locked room was missing. The next day, before the robbers left, they said to the maiden, "Peppa, today we want to eat stewed meat."

No sooner did the robbers leave, she began to walk around the house and found the missing key to the locked room. "Ahh! Now I'm sure I'll find my sister and give her something to eat," she said, but when she opened the door, she stood half inside and half outside and died on the spot.

When the robbers returned, they began to call her.

"Don't bother calling for her," one of them said. "I'm sure she went looking for her sister and is dead."

In fact, they found her dead, picked her up, and threw her inside the room along with all the other corpses. Then they returned to the old woman. When she saw them, she said, "How are my daughters?"

"Things aren't working out well with your daughters. We want another one."

"Loretta, do you want to go there?"

"I'll go."

The robbers took her, gave a little money to the old woman, and said, "Take it. Your daughters sent you this money."

Then they took Loretta to their home and gave her the keys in safekeeping. And she died like the others. And so it happened that the robbers carried off all seven daughters, one after the other: Teresa, Peppa, Loretta, Rosina, Cicca, Angela, and Salvatora, who was the youngest but the most clever. As soon as she arrived at the house, she began to call for her sisters.

"Hey, you want to know too much!" the robbers said. "Eat and drink, and don't worry about your sisters."

"Hmm!" said Salvatora. "Since you don't want to tell me anything, there's nothing I can do. We won't talk about it any more."

The next morning, she began to walk about the house, and when she found the key, she opened the door to the locked room where her sisters were and heard someone groan: "Jesus, I'm dying!"

It was the son of a king whom the robbers had kidnapped and thrown among the many dead bodies.

"I implore you in the name of God and the Saints," Salvatora said, "tell me who you are."

"I'm the son of the King of Spain. The robbers kidnapped me and threw me inside here."

"If you take me for your wife, I'll help you get out of here."

"May God bless you! As soon as we're at the royal palace, my mother's crown will be yours."

So she helped him get out, hid him behind a sack, and said, "Stay here tonight, and we'll see how we can get out of here."

Soon the robbers returned home and cried out: "Salvatora!"

"I'm coming! I'm coming!"

"Ah, she didn't enter the room, that one!" the robbers said and were very content. "She minds what we say and can take care of us!"

In fact, she served them a meal, and while they were eating, she said, "Today I found a key and many medicine bottles in one room. What are they for?"

"You want to know too much!" replied one of the robbers. Nevertheless, they showed her how they healed wounds with these ointments so that dead people returned to life.

The next day they said to her, "Salvatora, we're leaving, and we'll be gone for seven days. Don't open the door for anyone, not even for your mother!" And they departed.

No sooner did they leave than Salvatora entered the room and said to the son of the king, "Don't move from this spot until I go and look for an ass, cotton, and some other things, and then we can leave."

She found a basket, a knapsack, a pack saddle, cotton, and an ass. Then she returned to the prince and said, "Let's go. Everything's ready!"

She filled the basket with cotton and put the prince in the middle of it. Then she threw the basket over the back of the ass. She dressed herself as a rag dealer, and with a basket on her arm she began walking and pushing the ass and hitting it with a switch. After a short time she met the robbers. As soon as they drew close to her, she cried out, "Gee up! I've got seven sons and don't know how to support them!"

"Stop!" they commanded.

"Ahh! By the souls of the decapitated bodies,<sup>48</sup> I've got seven sons and don't know how to support them!"

"Just wait!" said one of the robbers and pierced the basket with his sword, but only cotton came out.

"Let her go. We've got enough cotton at home," another thief remarked.

48 The souls of the decapitated bodies (*le anime dei corpi decollati*) are among the most miraculous of the Sicilian people, especially in Palermo. See Pitre's book, *Le anime dei corpi decollati nelle tradizioni popolari siciliane*.

And so she continued walking. But when she reached the last robber, he turned to her and cried out, "Wait a moment!"

Salvatora turned to the prince and said with a whisper, "Oh, oh, prince. This time we're done for!"

"Wait," said the robber, who wanted to look into the basket, but when he saw the cotton, he let her go.

Salvatora moved on, and soon they arrived in the city of the King of Spain.

At the entrance of the royal palace there was a shoemaker in his shop, and the maiden told him to take her to the queen: "Go and ask the queen if she needs any cotton."

But the shoemaker's old wife responded, "Why should the queen need anything? She's lost her son. She's got other things to think about than cotton."

"Well, tell her that I've brought back her son!"

"May God bless you! The queen will give you a rich reward."

"What nonsense!" the shoemaker commented. "A rag dealer who says she's brought back the son of the king!"

Nevertheless, they went up to the palace with the basket and helped the prince get out. No sooner did he appear than he said, "Mother, this person is not a rag dealer but a maiden, and I want to marry her because she freed me from the dead corpses and the thieves."

But let us leave them and return to the robbers.

After seven days had passed, they returned to their home and knocked on the door, and there was no answer.

"Salvatora! Salvatora!" But there was no Salvatora, Salvatora!

"That's it! We've heard the last of her!" said one of the thieves. "I'm sure that the rag dealer we met on the road was Salvatora with the son of the king!"

"Well, now we've got to go and kill them right away! Right now!" the head of the robbers cried out.

So, they departed, and when they arrived in Spain, they spotted the old woman at the entrance of the palace, and she said to them, "The king's son arrived with a beautiful rag dealer, and now they're going to crown her as queen."

"Do you have enough courage," the robbers asked, "to go and place this note underneath the king's pillow? We'll give you a nice reward."

The old woman took the reward and put the note under the pillow. As soon as she saw that the maiden was alone, she went and told the robbers. Then they went straight to Salvatora and said, "Ah, little princess, have you become

the queen?!” And they turned to the old woman. “You, old woman, go and prepare a cauldron of oil and light a fire beneath it. We’ll take care of the little princess!”

Then they said, “Get undressed, princess! Old woman, is the oil boiling?”

“It’s boiling,” the shoemaker’s wife replied.

At that moment the princess shook her husband, and the note fell to the ground. He woke up, and everyone in the palace woke up with him.

You should have seen the robbers! They tried to escape wherever they could, but to be brief, they were all killed. Then the princess and the king went to the kitchen and found the old woman who was boiling the oil. The king asked her, “What are you supposed to do with this oil?”

Not recognizing the king, the woman said, “Beh! We’re supposed to use it to cook the queen.”


So they took the old woman, threw her into the cauldron, and later celebrated their good fortune.

They remained husband and wife

While we still don’t have a life.

*Told by Elisabetta Sanfratello at Vallelunga.*

## 23. THE THIRTEEN BANDITS

nce upon a time there was a teacher who had twelve students, and she instructed them how to sew in all sorts of ways. The entrance to the teacher’s house was inside the city, and the windows faced outside. One day she said to the young maidens, “If you hurry up and sew a lot, I’ll make you a beautiful dinner with dumplings this Sunday.”

The maidens worked hard at their sewing, and on Sunday there was a fine lunch of dumplings. They ate and amused themselves, and there were some dumplings left over for the evening. Then the maidens said to their teacher, “This evening we’ll stay here with you, my lady, and later on we’ll heat up the rest of the dumplings.”

“I have enough beds for all of you,” the teacher said. “I’m going to sleep, and you all can enjoy yourselves.”

Now among the maidens there was the daughter of a merchant who was truly mischievous. That night she went to heat up the dumplings, and she saw a light from the window while she and her companions were in the darkness. Then she turned to the others and said, “Listen to me, girls. I want you to tie

the sheet around my waist and lower me out the window, and I'll go and see where the light is coming from."

They lowered her, and she ran toward the light. When she reached the light, she saw an open door and cried out, "Anyone here?"

She didn't see anyone, but she saw a table set for twelve people. Then she entered the kitchen and smelled an odor. Everything was so delicious and beautiful! So she took all the food and carried it away. Saint Peter, help me, but if this place didn't belong to twelve bandits! Nevertheless, she returned safely to the teacher's house.

"Lower the sheet and pull me up," she said, and when she climbed back into the room, she knelt down and let out all the food so that they could eat and have a good time. Meanwhile the teacher slept. When they became tired, they also went to sleep.

Later the bandits returned, and when they entered their house, they saw that there was nothing there and cried out, "Ahh! My God! Some thieves have come and stolen from us. But tomorrow evening we'll see who's causing all this trouble here."

The next day the teacher saw the maidens talking among themselves and said, "What's going on, girls?"

"My lady," they responded, "we must be quiet, for we want to marry." And in the evening, they said, "My lady, we want to spend the night here." And they began to play.

Meanwhile, the bandits prepared their meal, and the chief of the bandits began to eat. At the same time, the youngest maiden had herself lowered down by her companions and ran to the palace.

"Anyone here?" she cried out.

Nobody responded, but the chief of the bandits had hidden himself to see who it was, a man or a woman. Then he saw the maiden enter into the kitchen and take the casserole and all the other things. Just as she was about to leave, the bandit appeared and said, "Ahh! You little rascal! This is the second time, and I've got you now!"

"Who are you?" the maiden said. "I needed some light last night, and I came here before going to sleep. But what was I to do? Listen, we're twelve maidens, and you're also twelve. Tomorrow evening I'll come with all of them, and we'll amuse ourselves."

As she left, he accompanied her and said, "Give me your word that you'll come back tomorrow evening."

"I give you my word," she said and ran to her companions. After she climbed through the window, she told her friends what had happened.

"But sister, why did you tell them we'd come? They'll be our ruin."

“Not at all, girls. Let me take care of things. Tomorrow evening you’ll come with me, and we’ll amuse ourselves.”

The next day she said to the teacher, “This evening you must come with us, and I’ll show you a good time. But each one of us must bring a bottle of wine that is drugged.”

The teacher went about her sewing and did some other things. In the evening she went out with the maidens.

“Anyone here?” the maiden cried out as they entered the palace of the thieves.

“Good evening!”

They found a table for twenty-six people.

“I’m going to take the bandit chief,” the maiden said since she only desired him.

They sat down at the table and began to eat. After a while they took out the bottles that were drugged, and after the glasses were filled, they began to drink. When the maiden saw they had passed out, she cut off the nose of one bandit, the lip of another, and the finger of another. Then she put them on a dish. She was now content, and she and her companions took everything and left.

Now, let’s now turn to the bandits. When they recovered from being drugged, they began to talk.

“How curious! You’re missing a nose!”

“And you’re missing a lip!”

“And you don’t have a finger!”

They broke into a rage, and their chief turned to them and said, “Let me take care of this. I’m going to get that mischief maker’s blood!”

Now let’s return to the maiden. The next day the maiden said to the teacher, “My lady, you must leave the house.”

And the teacher did as she was told. In the meantime the bandit chief took twelve coal sacks, and he had the twelve bandits get inside them. He placed pieces of coal on top of them. Then he disguised himself and went on the road toward Palermo. When he went to the merchant’s shop, he offered the twelve sacks of coal to him. They discussed the price, and after the merchant weighed them, they agreed on the price,

Now the daughter of this merchant was the mischievous girl, who had been with the teacher and had cut off the noses of the thieves. When she saw the sacks of coal, she said to her father, “Papa, these sacks are not filled with coal. Let me take care of this.”

She called the servant, and they made a good fire and heated up the kitchen spits. As soon as the spits were hot enough, *sissss, sissss, sissss*, the maiden took the spits and stuck them into the twelve sacks, killing all the bandits.

The next day the chief waited for the twelve bandits to return with their prize, but he had to keep waiting. Meanwhile, when the father of the mischievous maiden went to the kitchen, there was a terrible smell, and his daughter said to him, "Father, please be quiet because I'm going to show you something."

She called the servant who took the sacks and opened them. Both her father and the servant were astounded. In turn, the father called for the police and told them what had happened. The police ordered his men to carry off the dead bandits and then went to arrest the chief at his house. The maiden was toasted and celebrated, and the chief was arrested. After he was flogged, he was killed.

*Told by a woman from Borgo in Palermo.*

## 24. WHITE ONION

Once upon a time there was a father, who had a son, and he loved this son more than his own eyes. The man was rich and had a great deal of property. But there came a time when the poor man fell sick, and the Lord beckoned him. Since he couldn't be cured, he called his son, whose name was Giuseppe, and said to him, "My son, I'm going to die. Everything I have is yours, but I must tell you to watch out for the white rose bulb."

Now this young man had friends, and he went on some outings with them. One day as they were traveling, they noticed an ass coming toward them carrying the white rose bulbs of onions. When the young man saw this, he turned in fright and fled as fast as his legs could carry him. His friends were astounded about this and didn't know what to do or what to say.

Another time the same thing happened with some other friends. And they didn't know how to calm him down at all. So they went to see him, and as they began talking, they complained about his behavior.

"Excuse me, my friends," he responded. "You're right. But before my father died, he told me that I had to watch out for the white rose bulb. And ever since that day, I've avoided all places and roads where I might come across the white rose bulb of an onion."

His friends burst into laughter when they heard this and told him he was being foolish.

"This white rose bulb is not an onion from a garden," they said. "Rather it's a lady called Rose White, and when some one asks for her hand in marriage, she says, 'Yes, come, and we'll play a game of cards. If you win, you can

become my husband, but if you lose, you must leave.' Many great men have come, and they've all lost. She has become so rich that money doesn't have a meaning for her anymore."

This discussion was a blessed thing. From then on the poor young man could only think about Rose White, and he decided to travel and find her. Soon after his departure, he found her and presented himself to her: "My lady, I have searched for you a long time, and out of love for you I haven't been able to sleep, and I felt I was going crazy."

Rose White was generous and replied, "Well, my cavalier, enter and eat. If you defeat me in cards, I shall become your wife. If not, then we'll talk about it."

They ate and drank and then sat down at the table to play. And who do you think lost? The cavalier of course. And who continued to lose? Well, the cavalier became her doormat because he lost everything.

When the maiden was finished, she said, "My friend, you must leave."

Imagine how he felt when he looked into her beautiful eyes and saw her beautiful manners. He felt as if he would die . . . . However, he went away and returned to his house, where he gathered the rest of his money and returned to Rose White because he was obsessed and wanted to marry her. She received him graciously, and they began to play. Once more he lost his money, and she won so much that he was left without a cent to his name.

At the end, she said, "My friend, now you must leave because you've lost."

He departed and wandered into the open country. He was in despair and abandoned all hope. "She has all my possessions, and I don't have a way to get them back. Oh, what will be my fate? What am I to do! By the soul of my mother, I need your help. The only thing left to me is to sell the last property that I own, and if I don't win her with this money, I'll be ruined."

As he was grieving, he heard a voice calling his name: "Giuseppe! Giuseppe! What's the matter? Don't weep . . . . Turn around and go back, and you'll see a man who'll ask: 'What do you want?' And you're to say: 'Help me out of my dilemma.' And he'll respond: 'Don't despair. I'll certainly help you.' "

When the young man encountered the stranger later on, he told him everything, and the man said, "Yes, do sell your property. Then go back to this woman because you'll win."

"But how's that possible? The lady has always won."

"Listen to what you have to do. This woman has a ring, and when she plays, she takes it off and places it beneath the table. Well, this ring has a magic power, and you only have to pretend that you have a pain in your leg and cry out: 'Owww!' Fall to the ground, take the ring, and then continue playing. As

soon as you have the ring in your hands, luck will be on your side. You'll begin to win, and soon Rose White will be penniless."

So this is what he did. He sold his property and went to the lady, and she, with her usual tricks, greeted him ceremoniously and pretended that it was a pleasure to see him again. Meanwhile he watched her like a hawk. While he was watching, he saw her take off the ring and place it beneath the table. Then they began to play, and Giuseppe began to lose because he wanted everything to seem as it usually was. When he sensed that the right moment had come, however, he cried out: "Oww! I feel such pain!" Then he fell to the ground, grabbed the ring, and put it on his finger. What a change this meant! Many games were played, and he kept winning until he took everything from her. When she saw that she had lost, she said, "Don Giuseppe, you will be my husband. Nobody has been able to defeat me except you."

"This money is yours," he replied, "but first let's go to the church, and when we are married, I'll give it to you."

They remained happy and in peace

While we just sit here picking our teeth.

*Told by a woman of Borgo in Palermo.*

## 25. THE SILVERSMITH

Once upon a time there was a mother who had three children, two sons and a daughter. Her husband was dead, and her sons supported her through their work. One time—as we know, young people like to enjoy themselves all the time—the sons went hunting, and in the evening they brought their mother a bird with many different colors and a crown of feathers on its head.

"Mamma," they said, "look at this bird. We want you to look after it, and if the bird dies, you'll pay with your life."

The next day, as she was cleaning the birdcage, she found pearls, diamonds, and precious stones. Indeed, she was astounded and took them to a silversmith.

"How much will you give me for these jewels?"

After the man weighed them in his hand and looked at them, he said, "Let's keep it short. Thirty gold coins."

"All right, they're yours."

The next day, as she was cleaning the birdcage, the same thing happened.

She went to the silversmith and sold them to him. The third day, the same thing happened. Even on the fourth. Meanwhile, the silversmith became curious about where the woman got all the jewels. So one day he said, "Excuse me, lady, where do all these jewels come from?"

"Sir, I have a bird, and when it shits, it spurts out pearls and diamonds."

"Is that so? And do you have any daughters?"

"I have one."

Then one word led to another, and the silversmith said, "I'm single. Do you want to give me your daughter?"

"Why not?"

Within a short time they were married. The mother never confided in her children that the bird produced such valuable things. Some days after the wedding the mother continued to gather pearls, but the silversmith didn't enjoy any of this wealth. One time, tempted by the devil, he grabbed hold of the bird and killed it. The poor mother-in-law didn't know what to do because this was going to be the death of her.

"Where should I go and hide myself when my sons return?"

"Nothing to worry about," her son-in-law said. "If they come, tell them that the cat killed the bird. Buy another one at the market in Palermo, and stick it into the cage."

The mother-in-law did this, and soon her sons showed up.

"Where's the bird?"

"Oh, my sons, the cat caught it and killed it. Then I cooked it and put it into the pot. Afterward I went to the market and bought another bird just the same."

"Ahh, what a fool you are, mother!" her sons cried out.

They went into the kitchen, and each one of them took a piece of the bird to eat. The older brother grabbed the head with the crown, the younger, took the liver. After eating, they left the house. When they reached the country, the older brother had to go and relieve himself. He went and shat a pouch of gold coins. When he entered the city gate, the guards stopped him.

"Stop! You're under arrest."

"Why?"

"It's been decreed that the first man to enter this city is to be made king."

So they took him and anointed him king.

The second brother entered and could not find his older brother. He went to an inn and stayed there without knowing where his brother was. The last thing he suspected was that his brother was king! . . . This young man, too, also relieved himself and spewed forth gold and silver, and by dint of this virtue, he became a cavalier. He had lots of clothes, gold chains, and diamond

pins. A marvel to behold. Opposite the inn there was a young woman with an old maid. The cavalier and the woman began to flirt with each other with words and looks until they became engaged. The cavalier spent a good deal of money, and the maiden became curious to know where all his money came from and would have done anything to find out. The stupid cavalier confided the secret to her, and she called for the old woman and told her everything.

"Pretend to be in pain," the old woman said, "and tell him that you need the water of Montepellegrino.<sup>49</sup> When he brings it to you, pretend to drink it, but don't drink it. Then mix it into his lunch, and you'll see that he'll regurgitate the liver, which you're to take and eat. Afterward you'll shit gold."

Everything went well. To be brief, the maiden soon became rich, and the cavalier began to lose money. One day he threatened to kill her if she didn't vomit up the liver and give it back to him. So the old woman said to the maiden: "Here's what you have to do. Take him into the country where you'll find some particular herbs. Gather some of these herbs and make a salad for him. Then invite him to eat it together, but you don't touch it. As soon as he eats the salad, he'll become an ass."

The next day the maiden said, "Don Giovanni, why are you so cold to me? Is it because you threatened me the day before? But I haven't lost my love for you! I'm still the same, you know! Do you want to go and have a picnic together?"

When he heard those words, he felt more cheerful and said, "Well, if you'd like, let's go."

After they arrived in the country, she gathered some herbs and made a beautiful salad. As soon as they began eating, Don Giovanni turned into an ass. Then she picked up all the things and departed, leaving him alone like a dog in the country.

The ass began to wander all over the fields. At the end of one of them, there was an herb that he ate, and he was turned back into the Christian man he was.

"Ahh! I've got it!" Don Giovanni said.

He picked a bunch of herbs that could turn people into asses, and herbs that turned people back into good Christians. Then he left the field. When he reached the city, he went to the inn. As soon as his fiancée saw him, she felt she would die. However, he resumed flirting with her and gave her compliments, even though she was still full of wiles and stood on ceremony. Then, after three or four days, Don Giovanni cooked some herbs that made people turn into asses. He made a delicious dish and sent it to his fiancée. Foolish as

49 This is a mountain outside Palermo.

she was, she ate the cooked herbs, and after the first fork full, she became an ass.

"Ahh, things are going well," Don Giovanni said.

Then he went and fetched the water of Montepellegrino and made the ass drink it and throw up the liver. Afterward he washed the liver, swallowed it, and began once more to shit gold. Now he took a good halter, harnessed the ass, and hired her out to a miller to carry wheat every day.

One day the ass passed by her own house and began to bray. The old woman who knew everything was standing by the window.

"The poor maiden!" she said. "It's my mistress. I've got to take care of her."

She got dressed and went to the palace and told everything to the king, who was astonished. He sent a messenger to summon the miller with the ass and his brother. He pretended not to know that it was his brother.

"Well then," he said, "why did you make this maiden become an ass?"

"Ahh, your majesty, I suspect your Highness doesn't know," and he told him everything.

"And you," the king said, "don't you recognize me?"

"No, your majesty."

"How come? Don't you know that I'm your brother?"

"You're my brother?"

Enough said! They recognized each other and embraced.

"Now," the king said to his brother, "let's think about this poor maiden and put an end to her suffering. What herb do you have for turning her back into a woman?"

"There's a particular herb, but . . ."

"No buts, go and gather it!"

The brother could not do otherwise. He went and gathered the herb, and he gave the herb to the ass in front of the king. The ass ate it, and after the first mouthful was turned back into a Christian woman just as she was before.

"You see that all this is because you behaved so badly," the king said to the maiden. "Now let's put an end to this. Take my brother for your husband, and be happy."

So his brother married the maiden, and they sent for their mother and everything from their home was now at the palace. The older brother with the crown and the younger brother fabulously rich. Of course,

they lived happy and in peace  
while we sit here picking our teeth.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 26. PIETRO THE FARM STEWARD

There was once a farm steward who bought twelve sheep with his savings. This steward had a son named Pietro. One day, the steward died, and he left the twelve sheep to his young son, whom he had recommended to his padrone, the owner of the farm. This man put Pietro to work in the stables. The padrone was always at the farm, and he didn't have many amusements. His only vice was chess. One day he induced Pietro to play a game of chess with him, and the winner would get a sheep. But the young man said to him, "My sheep are yours, my lord!"

"No, we must play and make a wager."

When evening came, the padrone took out the chess set, and they began to play for a sheep—and Pietro won.

"Let's play for two sheep," the padrone said.

So they played, and Pietro won.

"Let's play for four sheep."

And Pietro won.

"Let's play for eight sheep."

And Pietro won.

"Let's play for sixteen sheep."

And Pietro won.

"Let's play for thirty-two sheep."

And Pietro won. In short, in one night Pietro won all the sheep and goats on the farm.

Then the padrone said, "Tomorrow you'll take charge of the fruit of your winnings."

"I'm not going to have anything to do with this. You're the master here, and I'm the stable boy."

"No, my son, 'the soul belongs to God, and things belong to whoever's turn it is.' The devil tempted me, and you've won everything."

The next evening the padrone called Pietro to play chess with him again. "I'll bet one cow against eight of your sheep."

They played, and Pietro won.

"Now let's bet one cow against one cow."

They played, and Pietro won. Then the young man said, "Padrone, open your eyes. The things that I've won are yours."

"No, my son, you've won, and they're yours."

The young man was intimidated and replied, "All right, let's do it this way.

You bet twelve cows against my hundred sheep,” and he said this with the feeling that he would lose.

The padrone agreed, and they began to play, and Pietro won. The padrone was annoyed and said, “Let’s bet twenty-four cows!”

They played, and Pietro won.

“Forty-eight against forty-eight!”

In short, in one night Pietro won all the cows that the padrone possessed.

Anger was eating away at the owner’s insides, and he said, “Tomorrow you’ll gather the fruit of your winnings.”

“No, my lord,” responded the young man (who respected the padrone as his superior), “you’re the padrone, and I’m the stable boy.”

Now the padrone only possessed horses, mares, and mules, and he said to Pietro. “You bet ten cows, and I’ll bet ten mares.”

So they opened the chess set and began to play again. And once more Pietro won.

“You beat me,” the padrone said. “Now let’s play forty-eight against forty-eight!”

In brief, in one night Pietro won all the mules, horses, and mares.

“Now there’s nothing left for me to do,” said the padrone, “than to bet the entire estate that I paid for in cash.”

“Padrone,” the young man said, “let’s play three games, and whoever wins two out of three is the winner.”

They opened the chess set and began to play. Pietro won the first, then the second, and finally the third—and it was all over.

“Well, Pietro,” said the padrone, “do you want me as stable boy? If you want me, I’m at your service. If not, I’ll go.”

“You were the padrone before,” Pietro responded. “Now I want you to be the steward of the farm. Does this make you happy?”

And they agreed upon this. The padrone knew everything there was to know because he had owned the farm for many years. So, he was the one who traveled to Palermo and dealt with the shopkeepers and all the others.

One day, while he was at Palermo he saw a proclamation: the daughter of the King of Spain was willing to marry the first man who could defeat her at chess. Whoever won could have her as his wife. After the steward read this poster, he returned to the farm very content and told Pietro. But Pietro said to him. “And who is going to play her?”

“Go there, Pietro! You’ll beat her.”

Pietro let himself be persuaded and journeyed to Palermo dressed as a peasant. After he arrived, he went to a jewelry shop and had a chessboard

made of silver and had some pieces made of silver and some of gold. Since he was in a hurry, he had a passport made. Then he departed for Naples.

After he arrived at Naples, he ate and took a long walk. When he became tired and sleepy, he went to bed. While he was asleep, three fairies happened to pass by and said, "What a handsome young man! (It seems to me I said that Pietro was a handsome young man.) It appears as if he's sleeping in a feather bed."

Then one of the fairies said, "It's been a delight to see him, but what shall we give him?"

The first one gave him a purse that never ran out of money. The other said, "Here's a table cloth, and any time you want to eat, this table cloth will provide you with as much as you want for as many people as you desire."

The third gave him a violin, and if people heard it, they had to dance, even if they were made of stone.

When Pietro awoke, he said, "What a dream I had! There were three ladies. One gave me a purse, the other a table cloth, and the third a violin."

Then he turned around and saw the purse, table cloth, and the violin.

"How strange!" he said. "Now I'll make a test."

So he took the table cloth and spread it.

"What is your command?"

"I want something to eat!"

And you should have seen what happened! Pasta, meat, cutlets, sausages—one dish arrived after another. Pietro ate and ate, and his stomach became as large as a bagpipe.

"Ah, things couldn't be better!"

Then he gathered everything together and continued his journey to Spain. At a certain point he found himself at a crossroad.

"Which way shall I take now?" he said to himself. "I think I may be lost. Now I'll test the violin."

He saw a swineherd and asked him, "My friend, what way must I take to go to Spain?"

"Any way," the man responded rudely.

"Ah, is this the way you treat gentlemen? Now I'll give you what you deserve!"

He took out the violin and began to play: *Zumm! Zumm!* And the swineherd began to dance; his pigs joined him, and they danced until they almost burst.

"Friend, have pity on us! Enough, enough!"

Pietro put away his violin, and the swineherd showed him the right way to Spain. So he kept traveling and soon arrived in Spain. He walked around the city in search of the royal palace, and since he knew how to read a little, he

read the proclamation about the king's daughter who was to wed whoever defeated her in chess. Finally, Pietro reached the palace.

"What do you want?" asked the guard.

"I want to go and play with the royal princess."

"Go away, you stupid peasant! The best kings and emperors have come here, and now you want to play against the royal princess!"

Pietro began to argue with the guard, and there were some courtiers standing at the window who heard the noise.

"Who is it?" they cried.

"A peasant," the guard responded. "He wants to enter."

"Let him enter. It's the king's proclamation."

And Pietro mounted the stairs, and the king received him. Then the king sent a messenger to his daughter with a note that said, "There's a stupid peasant who wants to play chess with you. Drop what you are doing and come!"

The princess took her chess set and went to the reception hall. When Pietro saw the royal princess open her chess set, he said, "Do you really play just with a wooden board and those pieces? Is this proper for a princess? Even I would be ashamed to do so."

And he took the chess set, threw it down on to the floor, and then took out his set. So the princess became suspicious and said to herself, "You're not a peasant, and I'll get to the bottom of this story."

They divided the pieces. The princess received the gold ones, and the silver ones went to Pietro. They began playing and kept playing until Pietro was winning. Then the royal princess gave him a pinch on his thigh with her hand, and when Pietro turned to see what was happening, she switched one of her last pieces so that Pietro lost the game.

"You've lost!" she cried out. "Your majesty, this man has lost! Throw him into prison."

They took Pietro to the prison where he found twenty-four princes and many other noblemen. But as soon as Pietro entered the prison, the games and fun began, and they began to mock him. Pietro responded: "Gentlemen, behave yourselves. If not, I'll make all of you dance."

But it was as if he had not said anything to anyone. They continued to make fun of him. So he went to a corner of the prison and took out his violin: *zumm, zumm*. And all of the princes and noblemen began dancing.

"Enough, Pietro, enough!"

"No. Calm yourselves, and then we'll talk!" And he continued to play the violin until he took pity on them. When he stopped, they all became friends. In fact, the princes began to compliment Pietro, the stupid peasant. After

two or three days passed, the princess asked, "What are they doing in the prison?"

"Ever since that peasant entered, they've been having fun," the guard replied.

"All right," said the princess. "Don't bring them any more food."

Soon the princes said, "We've got to get some food here either through money or friends. We'll draw lots to see who'll be the one to try and get us all some food."

As fate would have it, the task fell on Pietro's shoulders, and they said to him, "What kind of feast can he bring us?!"

Pietro responded, "Don't worry. We'll have food for today!"

In the meantime, he didn't do a thing. There wasn't the slightest sign of cooking in the kitchen, and the cat stretched out on the hearth. When it was time to eat, Pietro had everyone sit down and said, "What do you want to eat?"

"Whatever you want?"

Pietro spread out the table cloth and ordered appetizers for forty people. The princes remained astonished and looked at him with open eyes. Then he commanded: "And now what do you want?"

"Whatever you want, Pietro."

"Do you want meat?"

And suddenly there were great quantities of meat.

"Do you want wine?"

There were all kinds of wine.

The dishes of food kept coming, warm and steaming, and nobody could understand how all this was happening. Pietro even gave them ice cream and coffee. Aside from feeding all the prisoners, Pietro gave food to the guard because he wanted the king to know that they were amusing themselves. And the guard—everyone knows that guards are like spies—went to tell the king about all the bread and wine in great detail.

When the princess came, she said, "Bring that peasant here!"

After he arrived, she said, "Now, tell me, Pietro, how did you bring about that great meal?"

"Your majesty wants to know a lot. Well, I have a table cloth that gives me whatever I want to eat."

"Very well," she responded. "You bet your table cloth, and I'll bet myself, and we'll play chess to see who wins."

"All right, let's play," Pietro said.

They opened the chess set and began to play. While they were playing, Pietro had almost won the game when the princess gave him a good pinch

with her left hand. Pietro turned around, and in that moment the princess switched the pieces—so Pietro lost the game and had to remain in prison.

“You’re here again, Pietro?” the princes said.

“Again.”

“Ah, what a fool! She pulled the wool over you a second time!”

“She gave me a pinch and tricked me,” he said. “But let’s amuse ourselves for now, and then we’ll see.”

And they began to entertain themselves by dancing and playing jokes. Time passed quickly without them noticing it. After approximately one week, the princess wanted to know again what was happening, “Guard, what are the prisoners doing?”

“I’ve already told you, your majesty. They’re enjoying themselves and laughing. The peasant has a violin, and he makes everyone dance with it.”

“All right!” said the princess.

The next day she ordered Pietro to be brought up from the prison.

“Come here,” the princess said. “I hear that you’re the amusement of the prison. I also know that you have a violin. I’ll bet myself, and you bet your violin, and we’ll play for it.”

“All right, your majesty.”

They opened the chess set and got ready to play again. The princes had warned him: “Pietro pay attention and don’t turn when she gives you a pinch, otherwise you’ll lose!”

They began to play, and when the princess was about to be checkmated, she thought to herself, “This man is a great player!” And she prepared to give him a pinch, but Pietro noticed this and grabbed her hand and made her put the pieces back in their right places. “Play!” he said.

“Let go of my hand!”

“No! Play!”

“Let go of my hand!”

But the princess couldn’t do anything against Pietro. She had to play, and she lost. However, she said, “I have two of your things, the table cloth and the chess set. Let’s bet all these things and myself and play for them.”

“No,” said Pietro. “I’m the winner, and I don’t intend to play anymore.”

The news was brought to the king, and he said, “Very well, you may have my daughter.”

“But,” one of his courtiers said, “your majesty, you must realize that this young man can’t be a peasant because he has money, and he knows how to play chess better than your daughter. There’s more than meets the eye that we can see. Calm yourself.”

When Pietro saw that he was free, he wrote to his steward and said, “I

defeated the royal princess at chess, and now you can be the padrone of all my things because I don't need them anymore."

He took off the peasant clothes, and the king prepared a great celebration and ball and also a great feast for all the princes and noblemen. After Pietro married the princess, he said to the king, "Your majesty, now it seems to me that I'm the prison guard, and so I propose to set all the princes and noblemen free."

"I agree!" said the king.

So Pietro went to the prison and freed all the princes. Then he prepared a banquet, and in the end all the women danced, and nobody had any intention of leaving.

"What if they never leave?" Pietro said and turned to his wife. "Stop dancing and sit down next to me."

Then he took out his violin, and began to play it: *zumm, zumm*.

Soon everyone began to bump into each other, and they broke noses, and their faces became bloody. All hell broke loose, and they threw themselves down the stairs, leaving Pietro and his wife alone as king and queen and returned to their homes. Indeed,

they all remained happy and content,  
while we sit here without a cent.

*Told by Giovanni Vàrrica, a wall maker, husband of Teresa Vàrrica, a seamstress, whom Pitrè considered to be his best storyteller after Messina. All of her stories were told in the house of Luigi Siciliano, one of Pitrè's best friends. Michelangelo and Napoleone Siciliano were also present in Palermo.*

## 27. PEPPI, WHO WANDERED OUT INTO THE WORLD

**T**here was once a widow, who had three children, two girls and a son, who was called Peppi. This son did not know the first thing about earning his daily bread, while his mother and sisters made a living by spinning.

One day, Peppi said, "Mother, I want to tell you something. I'm going to wander out into the world."

So he took his leave and departed. He walked and walked until he saw a large farmhouse. When he entered, he said, "Do you need a young man to help out here?"

But as soon he said this, he heard, "Dogs! Dogs, attack him!"

And the dogs were set on Peppi, who ran away and continued his journey. When it was almost night, he saw another farmhouse and entered saying, "Viva Maria!"

"And Viva Maria to you! What do you want?"

"If you need a young man . . ."

"Oh," someone said. "Yes. Sit down, sit down. We could probably use a replacement for the cowherd who may be leaving. Wait here while I go ask the boss." And one of the farm workers went to ask the owner of the farm, who responded, "Yes. Give him something to eat, and then I'll come down to talk to him about this."

The farmhand gave Peppi some bread and a plate of ricotta, and he began to eat. Meanwhile, the owner came down just as the cowherd had returned, and the owner said to him, "Tell me, are you leaving?"

"Yes, my lord."

Then the owner said to Peppi, "Tomorrow morning you'll go out into the field with the cattle. But listen to the way things are, my son. If you want to stay here, I can only give you room and board and nothing more."

"All right," Peppi responded. "May God's will be done."

It turned dark, and they all went to sleep. The next morning, Peppi took some bread and butter and went into the fields with the cattle. Some months passed, and Peppi kept taking the cattle into the field and returning to the farmhouse in the evening. When Carnival season approached, Peppi began to sulk, and the owner of the farm came and said,

"Peppi!"

"Oh!"

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing!"

The next morning he left with the cattle, still very sulky.

When the owner noticed this, he said to him, "Peppi!"

"Oh!"

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing!"

"Nothing, Peppi? It's better if you tell me."

"And what should I say? The Carnival festivities are approaching, and you have nothing to give me so that I can go to the parties and amuse myself with my mother and my sisters?"

"Hmm, I can give you some things, Peppi, but not money, just as we agreed. If you want bread, take as much as you want."

"But if I want to buy some meat, how can I do that?"

"I can't give you any money. We made a deal long before this."

The next day when it turned light, Peppi went into the field with the calm and patient cattle and was still as sulky as ever. While he was in his gloomy mood, he heard someone calling him: "Peppi!"

He turned around and looked about, and then he said to himself, "It must be fear that's causing me to hear things."

"Peppi, Peppi!"

"Who's calling me?"

"It's me!" one of the oxen said.

"What! You can talk?"

"Yes, but how come you're so sulky?"

"How else should I be? Carnival's coming, and my boss hasn't given me a thing."

"Listen to what you should say, Peppi. When you return this evening, tell him, 'The least you can give me is that old ox.' He'll give me to you because he can't stand the sight of me and because I never wanted to work. You'll see, he'll give me to you as a gift."

That evening Peppi returned to the farmhouse gloomier than ever, and his boss said to him, "Peppi, why are you continuing to sulk?"

"I've got to ask you something: why won't you at least give me the ox that's older than a screech owl. At least, when I go home, I can skin it and slice up its hard meat."

"Take it. Get some rope, and take it away!"

The next day Peppi took the ox, put eight loaves of bread in a knapsack, and began walking toward his village. When he reached a large plain, he saw two men on horseback come riding toward him: "Watch out! Watch out! There's a bull on the loose, and it will kill you!"

But the ox said, "Peppi, tell them, 'if I catch it, will you give it to me?' "

Peppi asked them, and they responded, "What?! You'll never be able to catch it. The bull will kill you and the ox together!"

"Get behind me and don't be afraid!" the ox cried out to Peppi.

Then the bull arrived snorting furiously, and the ox and bull went at each other locking horns until the old ox knocked out the bull.

"Peppi, tie the bull up and attach it to my horns," the ox said.

After Peppi tied up the bull, he said goodbye to the horsemen and continued on his way with the bull tied to the ox. When the bull revived, it bucked three or four times and then gave up.

After they arrived in another village along the way, Peppi heard a proclamation: "Whoever manages to plow a piece of land and fertilize it within a day will wed the king's daughter. In the event that he is already married, he will receive two barrels of gold coins. If he fails, his head will be cut off."

Peppi took the ox and the bull to a stall and then went to the king. The guard didn't want to let him enter because he was so poorly dressed, but the king was at the window and ordered the guard to admit him. When Peppi arrived, he threw himself at the feet of the king.

"What do we have here?"

"I heard the proclamation, and since I have an ox and a bull, I want to see if I can plow the land."

"But did you hear the proclamation well?"

"I heard it. If I fail, I'll lose my head. But your majesty must provide me with a little hay and a plough because I have nothing. I'm just wandering about."

"Bring your ox and bull to my stables, and take care of them," said the king.

Peppi went and took the ox and the bull, and the old ox said to him, "Give me half a load of the hay, and the bull a whole load."

That evening Peppi was given something to eat, and the next day he was given a plough and four loads of hay, and he left. They indicated which field he was to plow near the village. He harnessed the ox and bull and went to work. By breakfast time he had ploughed almost half the field. So he ate and gave half a load of hay to the ox and a whole load to the bull. After they finished eating, they continued to work and plough the field.

Meanwhile the king's councilors stood on the balcony and saw how things were going. Then they ran to the king and said, "Your majesty, what's happening? Does your lordship realize that he's almost finished with the plowing? Do you really want to give your daughter to this ugly peasant?"

"Well, what do you advise?" the king said.

"Send him a roast chicken at noon, a bottle of wine that's been drugged, and some good celery."

So they sent him all of this food and wine, and the servant said to him, "Eat, Peppi. It will refresh you."

Since there only remained a small piece of land to plow, he began to eat along with the animals: the bull, a load and a half of hay, the old ox, one half a load of hay, while Peppi enjoyed the chicken and the wine. After he drank all the wine and ate the chicken, he fell asleep.

When the old ox saw that the bull had enough hay, it didn't say anything, but when it saw that the bull had finished eating, it began to shake Peppi with its hoof.

"Ah, ah, ah," Peppi said.

"Get up," said the ox. "Get up, or else they'll chop off your head!"

So Peppi got up, washed his face, and harnessed the ox and the bull. He finished plowing the small piece of earth and began fertilizing it. It was now

eight in the evening, and the councilors were watching from the window and saw that he had already fertilized half the field. "Ah, we didn't use enough opium!"

Meanwhile Peppi was working with all his might, and he finished by midnight. He put away the plough, and after taking care of the ox and the bull, he returned to the palace and addressed the king,

"May your lordship bless me, dear father!"

"Oh-oh! . . . You've finished?! . . . What do you want? Do you want two barrels of gold coins?"

"Your majesty, I'm a bachelor. What would I do with the gold coins? I want to get married right away!"

So immediately they took him, washed him, and dressed him like a prince. Indeed, he seemed fit to be a prince. They even gave him a watch. And so he was married just as the king had married off his two other daughters to princes.

"Now that you've married, you must slaughter me," the old ox said to Peppi. "Then you are to collect my bones in a basket except for one hoof that you're to put in your mattress. Afterward, take the bones that you've collected in the basket and plant them one by one in the field that you've plowed. As for my flesh, you're to give it to the cook and tell him to prepare it any way he wants as rabbit, hare, chicken, sheep, fish, or whatever he wants."

Enough said. Peppi slaughtered the ox. The king didn't want him to do this, but Peppi said, "Nothing to get upset about. I'm doing it so that you'll have plenty of meat."

He ordered the cook to prepare the meat as though it came from different animals and to put the bones and the hoof aside, and a large banquet was prepared. There was a big table, and the king began to eat the different dishes: "This is hare and that's rabbit. What a large feast it was! The best meat!"

After they ate, they got up from the table, took a beautiful walk, and returned in the evening to go to bed. As soon as Peppi's wife fell asleep, he slipped the hoof into the mattress. Then he took the basket on his back, went into the garden, and planted the bones in orderly fashion. Afterward he returned to the bed without making a sound so that his wife heard nothing.

When they woke up, his wife said, "Oh! Oh! What a dream I had! It was as if many cherries and apples were hanging before my mouth. I saw lots of roses, pink carnations, jasmine, and other flowers. . . . Oh, what an aroma! It's as if they were still slightly grazing my face!" She stretched out her hand and picked an apple. "Look, my dream is true!" she cried.

"Let's see," her husband responded, and he stretched his hand and gathered some cherries. As soon as he had them, he cried, "How beautiful!"

Now the king and all the people in his court got up, and when they stood at the window, they smelled an aroma that refreshed their hearts. The king began to eat the rare fruit. Then he drank some coffee. Meanwhile his councilors stood on the balcony and looked at the ground that Peppi had plowed, and they saw that it was filled with all sorts of trees. Then they rubbed their eyes and said, "But it's true. Our eyes are not deceiving us!"

They called the king and said, "Your lordship, look. Doesn't that orchard belong to the land that Peppi had plowed and fertilized?"

The king, too, rubbed his eyes and said, "It really is true. My eyes aren't deceiving me."

They got into carriages to go and see, and when they arrived, they found orange trees, lemon trees, plum trees, cherry trees, vineyards, fig trees, peach trees, and many other kinds, all bearing fruit. The king gathered a little fruit and then returned to the palace.

Soon after, when the other two princes saw all this, they said their wives, "Go and ask your sister how all this was done."

So they went to her and asked, "How did your husband manage to do all this?"

"How am I supposed to know?"

"You silly thing! Ask him!"

"I'll ask him tonight."

"All right, and then come and tell us."

That evening, when they went to bed, she began to ask her husband with such insistence that he confided everything in her just to keep her quiet. The next day, his wife went and told her sisters, and in turn they told their husbands.

One day, when they were all together with the king, the princes said to Peppi, "Let's make a bet, cousin Peppi."

"What kind?" Peppi responded.

"We bet that we can guess how you managed to get all those trees to grow."

"Agreed!"

"All right, if we win, you have to give us all the things that you've acquired here, and if you win, we have to give you all that we possess."

They went to a notary and signed an agreement. Once that was done, the princes guessed rightly, and Peppi had to give them everything he owned and was left with nothing—moreover, now he began to starve. So, one day, the disgraced Peppi took a sack, dressed himself in his old clothes, and departed.

After he had walked for some time, he arrived at a hut and knocked.

"Who is it?" a hermit asked.

"It's me, father."

"And where are you going?"

"Can you tell me where the sun rises?"

"Oh, my son! You can spend the night here. Tomorrow morning, you're to follow the path, and you'll meet a man who's much older than I am."

At dawn the next day the hermit gave him a little bread. Peppi took his leave and departed. He began walking and reached another hut where a hermit with a white beard that reached his knees was living.

"My blessings, holy father!"

"What do you want? What do you want?"

"Can you tell me where the sun rises?"

"Ah, my son, keep walking. Up ahead there is a man who's much older than I am."

Peppi took his leave and departed. When he arrived at another hut, he kissed the hands of the hermit and said, "May God bless you, my honorable father!"

"Where are you going?"

"Can you tell me where the sun rises?"

"Ah, my son! . . . Enough . . . Perhaps you'll get there. Take this pin. Walk on, and when you hear a lion roar, you're to say, 'Friend lion, your friend the hermit has sent greetings. I've brought this pin to take out the thorn in your paw, and in exchange I ask that you let me speak with the sun.' "

Peppi departed, and when he reached the lion, he removed the thorn from his paw.

"Ah, you've given me back my life!" the lion said.

"Now you must help me speak with the sun."

"Come!" And the lion took him to a large sea of black water. "Don't move from here. A serpent will emerge before the sun appears, and you're to say, 'Oh friend serpent, your friend the lion sends his greetings, and in exchange I'm asking you to help me speak with the sun.'"

The lion left, and Peppi watched as the water began to stir, and when the serpent appeared, Peppi did as the lion told him to do.

"Peppi," replied the serpent, "quick, jump into the water and get under my wings. Otherwise, the sun's rays will burn you!"

Peppi got under a wing, and when the sun rose, the serpent said to him, "Quick, tell the sun what you want to say before it goes away!"

So Peppi began: "Oh sun, you traitor! It must have been you who deceived me! Why did you do this, you terrible traitor?!"

After hearing this accusation, the sun said, "It wasn't me who deceived you. It was your wife to whom you told your secret!"

“Well then, please pardon me, oh sun. But I would like a favor. Can you set at twelve thirty tonight so that I can go and regain my things?”

“All right, I’ll do this favor for you.”

So Peppi took his leave, thanked everyone along the way, and returned home.

When he arrived, his wife brought him some broth so he felt refreshed. Then he sat down once more with the princes and said to them, “Well now, my cousins, let’s make a wager.”

“What can you bet if you no longer have anything?”

“I’ll bet my head, and you bet all your things as well as the things that you acquired from me.”

“Agreed, but what should we bet on?”

“Let’s bet when the sun will set,” Peppi replied.

“Good!” the princes said among themselves. “He’s insane. He doesn’t even know when the sun will set.” Then they turned to Peppi: “All right, we bet the sun will set at eleven thirty.”

“And I say that the sun will set at twelve thirty.”

They went to sign the agreement and then began watching the sun that began setting at eleven thirty. At this point Peppi said, “Oh sun, is this the way you keep your word?” Then the sun, instead of setting, slowed down so that it finally set at twelve thirty.

“What did I tell you?” Peppi said.

“You were right!” the princes said, and Peppi took all their things and regained all of his own possessions as well. Then he said to the princes, “All right, now I want to show you what a peasant’s heart is truly like!”

Indeed, they had always said that he was a peasant! And he gave them back all their things and said, “Take them. I don’t want things that belong to other people. I only want what belongs to me.”

And he kept his own and gave back all their things. Then he withdrew to live with his wife as he had lived with her before. As for the king, he embraced Peppi, took off his crown, and set it on Peppi’s head. Imagine how angry the princes were when they saw the crown on Peppi’s head! However they didn’t show it. The next day there was a magnificent banquet. All the relatives were invited, and they enjoyed themselves. The dishes came one after another and ended with coffee, ice cream, and also cream cakes—and so Peppi, the cowherd, who was once starving from hunger, became a king.

*Told by Antonio Loria and collected by Leonardo Greco at Salaparuta.*

## 28. THE MAGIC PURSE, CLOAK, AND HORN

Once upon a time, so it's been told, there was a father who had three sons, and the only thing he had was a house. One day, he sold the house, and he kept the rights to three round tiles laid in the ground in front of the door. When death approached, he wanted to write a will even though his relatives said to him, "What can you leave behind you? You have nothing."

In fact, his sons did not want to call for the notary. But some other friends went and did this. When the notary arrived and asked the father what he should write, he responded, "I had a small house and sold it, keeping three tiles for myself. I want to leave the first tile to my oldest son, the second to my middle son, and the third to my youngest."

These three sons were not very content—moreover they were also starving. When the father died, the eldest son thought about his situation and said, "I can't manage to make a living in this country. It's better that I take the tile that my father left me, and go to another country."

When he went to the house to detach the tile from the ground, the new owner asked him to leave it alone, for she had paid for it. But he became annoyed and said, "No, my father left me the tile, and I'm going to take it with me!"

Indeed, he detached the tile and found a tiny purse beneath it. So he took the purse along with the tile and departed. When he arrived at a certain place, he decided to rest, stuck his hand into the purse, and said, "Purse, give me two coins so that I can buy a little bread." And immediately he found two coins inside. When he saw them, he said, "Oh purse, give me a hundred gold coins." And the purse gave it to him and continued to give him as much as he wanted.

Soon he became rich and amassed a great deal of money until he had enough to build a palace in front of the king's palace. He often stood by the window, and while he looked out, he saw the king's daughter standing in her window. So he began to flirt with her, and at the same time he formed a friendship with the king who invited him into his home. The princess saw that he was richer than her father and said, "I'll take you for my husband, but only after you reveal to me where all your money comes from."

Simple-minded as he was, he trusted her and showed her the purse. Without arousing his suspicion, she drugged him with opium, and when he fell asleep, she had a similar purse made and exchanged it with the one that always produced money. When the young man awoke, he saw that his purse no

longer produced money, and in order to eat, he began to sell all his fine things until he became poor and didn't have a penny left in his pocket.

In the meantime he learned that his middle brother had become rich, and he decided to seek him out. When he arrived, they kissed and embraced, and the young man told his brother all about his misfortune. Then he asked, "How did you manage to become so rich?"

And his brother told him that at one point he had nothing and decided one day to go and take the tile that their father had left him, and beneath the tile he found a cloak. He put it on for a joke, and then he realized that the people did not see him. He tried it another time, and while he was among many people, they didn't see him. So what did he do? Since he was almost dying of hunger, he went into a tavern, took some bread, food, and other things, and left without being seen. Thus he began to rob silversmiths and shopkeepers. He even went and plundered the king and became so rich that he did not know what to do with all the money.

"If this is the way things are," the poor brother said, "well, if this is really the way things are, dear brother, do me a favor and lend me the cloak until I set things straight again, and then I'll return it to you."

Since his brother loved him very much, he gave him the cloak and said, "Of course. Take it. Make yourself rich and then return it to me."

"As soon as I've restored things, my brother, I'll return it to you."

Then he took his leave and departed. As soon as he was on his way, he immediately began robbing even more so than his brother. And he stole money, gold, silver, and anything he could find. When he became wealthy again, he began visiting the king and flirting with the princess. When she saw that he had become richer than he was before, she began to treat him kindly.

"Where did you get all this money from?" she asked. "And how did you become richer than my father? If you tell me, I'll make you happy, and we can marry right away!"

Since she seemed sincere, he placed his trust in her once again and showed her the cloak.

But what did the princess think of doing? Well, she said, "You know what we'll do? First we'll eat, and then we'll enjoy ourselves."

So he ate and drank, and she drugged him with opium one more time. Then she had a similar cloak made and robbed him of the one that made him invisible. When he was awake again, he took his leave and went away. But only some time later did he become aware that he no longer had the real magic cloak. He usually visited a maiden who had six brothers and wore the cloak so that the brothers never saw him kissing her. When he returned there, they were all together. So he entered quietly, as he usually did, approached her, and

began kissing her and embracing her, thinking that nobody saw him. But this time her brothers saw him quite well and became outraged. They ran after him and gave him a tremendous beating, leaving him more dead than alive. In disgrace, he had no other choice but to leave that country and return to his own, limping all the way. During his journey he managed to earn some bread by working. Once he arrived home, he learned that his youngest brother had become quite rich. He had a beautiful palace with many servants. So he thought: "Now I'll go to visit my brother. I'm sure he won't kick me out."

In fact, when his brother saw him, he said, "Dear brother, where have you been? I thought you were dead." And he kissed and embraced him with a happy face. When the older brother saw such a warm reception, he summoned his courage and asked, "How did you become so rich?"

"You know that our father left me the third tile," he said. "Well, one day when I was desperate, I went to detach the tile to sell it, and underneath I found a horn. When I saw it, I began blowing it out of fun. As soon as I did this, many soldiers appeared all at once and declared, 'Your desire is our command!' So, I took a deep breath and blew the horn again, and tons of soldiers appeared. When I was sure that everything worked well, I began marching to different cities and ordered my soldiers to start all kinds of wars and battles to get money. When I saw I had enough money, I returned here and had this palace built. Now you know how I managed to become so rich."

After they finished their conversation, the older brother asked him to do him a favor and lend him the horn because he, too, wanted to become rich, and he would return the horn as soon as he did this. The younger brother agreed provided that he returned the horn. Then they embraced and kissed each other, and the poor brother went out to seek his fortune.

In fact, he headed directly toward a city known for its wealth and blew the magic horn. All at once many soldiers emerged, and when they had filled an entire plain, he ordered them to sack the city. Within a short time, they returned to him loaded with money, silver, and rich merchandise and deposited everything with him. Those soldiers who didn't bring him anything, he blew back into the horn. Now he went to the city where the king was living with his only daughter. He took some rooms in the finest tavern and had all his money and merchandise put in a safe place, blew the rest of the soldiers back into the horn, and then put the horn away. When he went to visit the princess and her family, he was received as usual with great cordiality and remained for dinner.

But the princess could think of nothing but how she might find out how he had become so rich once again. So she began to flatter him in her usual way and to treat him kindly until he confided in her that he had a magic horn, and

he could even make millions of soldiers come out of it—and he would show it to her.

The princess pretended not to be interested, but at lunch she gave him a drug that would make him sleep twenty-four hours, the time that she needed to get the magic horn and to make a counterfeit one. When he awoke the next day, the king and his daughter pretended to be mortified and sent him away because he had drunk too much.

Humiliated, he went to another country taking with him all his wealth and money that he still possessed. Along the way, however, twelve robbers appeared, and he thought he still had the horn that would quickly take care of them. When he blew it to summon the soldiers and wipe out the twelve robbers, he blew in vain. The thieves robbed him, and they gave him a good beating because he was so bold to have wanted to fight against twelve armed men. They left him lying on the ground, and it was a miracle that he was more alive than dead with the horn in his mouth that he continued to blow. Finally, he realized that it was not the magic one. Thinking that he had ruined himself and his brothers as well, he decided to make an end of his life and throw himself off a cliff.

After walking a great distance, he came to the top of a cliff where he took a great leap and jumped off. But before he could hit the ground, he got caught in a tree of black figs. So, seeing that the tree was loaded with such beautiful fruit, he decided to have a fine meal. “At least I’ll die with a full stomach!” he said to himself. But after he had eaten about thirty, he began to feel horns sprouting all over him, on his head and his nose, and he became a real monster. Now he was even more despondent, and he threw himself once more from another cliff to kill himself. But after he fell a few feet, he found himself stuck on another fig tree, this time loaded with white figs even more than the other tree had. The poor fellow had bruises all over and decided to rest a bit, but when he saw the beautiful figs, he said to himself, “I can’t grow any more horns than I already have, and besides I have to die—I might as well make a good meal out of them!” But no sooner did he taste three of them than he discovered that three of his horns disappeared. So he continued to eat, and with each fig, one of his horns disappeared. So he kept eating until all the horns had disappeared—and he was better looking than before.

When he saw that he no longer had any horns, he decided to shake the tree and gathered together a good quantity of black figs. Then he returned with them to the city more handsome than he ever was. Later he put the black figs in a beautiful basket, dressed himself as a peasant, and went to the palace to sell them because they were out of season. The guard called him and brought

him to the king, who immediately paid him for the figs. When he was paid, he kissed the knees of the king and went away.

At lunch the king and his entire family ate the beautiful figs. Since the figs pleased the princess so much, she ate more than the others. Once lunch was finished, they suddenly saw that their bodies and faces were covered with horns, and the princess had more than anyone else. They were all astounded and had no idea how to get rid of the horns. So they summoned all the doctors of the city, but the doctors said that there was no remedy. So, the king issued a proclamation announcing that whoever could get rid of the horns would be granted any favor he wanted and all his wishes would be fulfilled.

When the seller of the figs heard this proclamation, he returned to the white figs and gathered together a beautiful basket full of them. Then he put them in a kind of purse, dressed himself as a doctor, and went to the king. The guard let him pass, and he mounted the palace stairs and presented himself to the king.

"Your majesty, I can save you and everyone else. I know how to get rid of the horns . . ."

When the princess heard these words, she turned to her father and said, "Your highness, let me be the first to have the horns removed!"

The king consented and sent them to a room for a week. As soon as they were alone, the doctor said, "Do you recognize me? Listen to what I have to say: if you restore the purse that produces money, the cloak that makes you invisible, and the magic horn, I'll get rid of your horns. If not, I'll cause even more to grow!"

The princess had suffered a great deal of pain, and she knew that the young man had already possessed many magic things. So she believed him and said, "Yes, I'll restore everything on the condition that you get rid of all the horns and become my husband."

He consented, and the princess returned the magic purse, cloak, and horn. So he had her eat as many white figs as there were horns on her—and all the horns disappeared.

After he removed the horns from the princess, he took care of the king, the queen, and all the others who had eaten the figs. Finally, he asked for the hand of the princess as his reward. The king granted his wish, and they were married.

Now the young man restored the cloak and horn to his brothers, and he kept the purse. He remained the king's son-in-law, and after a year, when the king died, he and his wife became king and queen. Of course,

they were happy and content.

But we still can't pay the rent.

*Collected by Salvatore-Pasquale Vigo di Lionardo at Mangano.*

## 29. THE POOR SHOEMAKER DYING OF HUNGER

**I**'ve heard tell that there was once a shoemaker who had a wife and three daughters. He was truly miserable and poor. He carried his tools in a sack around his neck and went about crying, "Any shoes to repair?"

Then he said to himself, "Oh Lord! Nobody is responding . . . There's nothing left for me to do but drown myself."

He left and went to the river Bilici<sup>50</sup> to drown himself. While he was preparing to throw himself into a deep pool of water, his fate approached him and said, "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to drown myself because of my bad fortune."

"No, don't drown yourself," the fate said. "Take this pocket knife, and while you are traveling, I want you to collect some herbs. Beneath each herb that you cut, you'll find silver coins."

The shoemaker took the knife and did as he was told. Beneath each herb that he cut, he found silver coins and ran off singing, "*Ta-la-le-ru, ta-la-le-ru*, I'm rich!"

As he passed a nearby monastery, the monks heard him and called to him, "Come over here, friend Peppi. What's the matter?"

"What should the matter be? I'm rich!"

He went inside, showed them the knife, and told them everything. The monks decided to steal it from him. So they gave him something to eat and got him drunk. Then they took the knife and put another one into the sack. Afterward he went home.

"Wife, wife," he cried out. "We're rich!"

"What's happened to you? Have you lost your mind?" his wife cried out, and she turned to her son and said, "Your father's gone mad?"

"Just come with me. I have something to show you!"

"Let's go so he can get rid of his madness."

And they went to a field to cut some herbs, but how could he find the silver coins when the monks had switched knives?

"Ahh! How bitter my fortune is! I'm ruined! I'm going to drown myself."

He left and went to drown himself in the river once again. But his fate appeared and said, "Why have you come here?"

"Now I'm really going to drown myself!"

"No, don't drown yourself. I'm here to help you," the fate said to him.

<sup>50</sup> This is the river Belice also called Hypsa in ancient times. The river passed through Gibellina and Salaparuta and emptied into the Mediterranean Sea.

"Take this ass and this stick. Each time that you hit it with this stick, you'll get a load of money."

And his fate gave him a stick and the ass. The shoemaker began to hit the ass and said, "I want to see if this is true. It could be that the fate is playing a trick on me."

But each time he beat the ass with the stick, there was a bunch of money. Once again he passed by the monastery singing, "*Ta-la-le-ru, ta-la-le-ru!*"

The monks called to him, "Our friend Peppi is coming by again. Well, we've got to do something."

So they called out to him and said, "Friend Peppi, why are you running about and singing this way?"

"I'm rich!"

He began to beat the ass, and the ass shat a great deal of money. The monks gave the shoemaker something to eat and once again got him drunk by doping his drink. When he woke up, the monks gave him a different ass with another stick, and he went home to his wife.

"Hey! Wife, we're rich!"

"Now your father really wants to be thrashed . . ."

"Spread a sheet on the ground!" he cried out.

"Are you crazy? Why are you asking me to spread out a sheet?"

"Spread it, I said!"

So she took a sheet and spread it on the ground, and the shoemaker began to beat the ass. The poor ass could only respond by filling the sheet with shit. In turn the shoemaker's wife and sons gave him a good beating, and he ran off complaining, "Now I'm really going to drown myself. I mean it this time! I'm serious!"

He went to the river, and when he was about to drown himself, his fate appeared and said, "Are you here again?"

"Get out of my way! Get out so I can really drown myself! This time I don't want anything."

"You fool! Are you really so discouraged? Aren't I here?"

The fate pulled out a bag and gave it to him and said, "Go to the monks and tell them, 'Either you give me back the ass that shits money and the pocket knife, or I'll have your heads beaten to a pulp.' Then you're to say, 'Come out shoe-horns!' and the shoe-horns will pop out and hit them on the head." Then you're to say, 'Enough, shoe-horns!' and the shoe-horns will slip back into the bag."

The shoemaker went to the monks and began to cry out, "Give me back the ass that shits money and the pocket knife!"

But the monks were confident and pretended to know nothing about

what he was saying. The shoemaker became angry and said, "Come out, shoe-horns!"

All at once the shoe-horns came out of the sack and began to hit the monks on the head causing bruises and bumps.

The monks cried out, "We'll give them to you! We'll give them to you!"

"Enough, shoe-horns!" responded the shoemaker, and the shoe-horns returned into the bag.

But the monks did not want to give him the things so he said, "Give them to me, or I'll call the shoe-horns again!"

The head monk said, "Give them to him, otherwise he'll kill us."

So, they took the ass and the knife and gave them to him.

"I want to see whether you've given me the right ass this time," and he beat it with a stick. Out popped the money all over the place. So, the shoemaker left the money there and went home to his wife.

"We're rich!" he exclaimed.

"The madman's returned!"

"Spread the sheet!"

"What do you want? Think about the beating you got this morning?"

"I told you to spread it!"

"Do you want another beating from us?"

"All right. Come out, shoe-horns!" And the shoe-horns beat his wife and sons on their heads so that they began to cry out: "We'll get the sheet! We'll get the sheet!"

Once they got the sheet, they spread it out on the ground. The shoemaker began beating the ass and said, "Out with the money," and the ass spewed forth a large bunch of coins. When everyone saw the money, his wife said, "Oh! My little husband, how wonderful you are!"

"Oh! Dear little father, how amazing you are!" his daughters cried.

And they all embraced and caressed him and gave him a clean pair of pants to wear. Moreover, they took a comb and began grooming him. Yes, they remained happily ever after very rich,

the husband, daughters, and his wife,  
while we have nothing at all in our life.

*Told by Antonio Basile to Leonardo Greco in Salaparuta.*

## 30. THE LITTLE NUN

Once upon a time there was a father and a mother who had a daughter. Before the father went to work in the fields, he said to his wife, "When the soup is ready, have the girl carry it to me."

At noon the mother cooked the soup and told the daughter to carry it to her father. To make sure she would find her way home, her mother gave her some bran to spread along the path. After the girl had brought the soup to her father, she found that the wind had carried away the bran so that she couldn't find her way back home. When it became dark, the girl began to weep and said, "What am I going to do? It's become night, and I'm far away from my father and mother."

While she was weeping so loudly, she encountered a little nun who heard her and asked her why she was weeping. The girl told her what had happened, and the nun promised to help her find her way back. She gave her a small cloth and said, "This cloth will meet your needs. If you want to eat, you just have to tell it, and the cloth will give you everything you want."

The girl became as happy as the day is long and went on her way without fear of getting lost. As she was walking, she tested the cloth and asked for pasta, meat, and bread, and the cloth gave her everything. Now, I must say this in advance, the little nun had given her the cloth on condition that she was not to tell her father and mother about the cloth and was always to keep it hidden. But no sooner did the girl return home than her very first thought was to tell her mother all about the magic power of the cloth. So they spread it, and since the father's brother had just arrived, they ordered the cloth to provide all kinds of food, and it obeyed. After they ate, they put away the cloth.

One day, the father's brother, who knew that his brother and his family were extremely poor, said to his wife, "How is it that my brother is eating so well and has endless amounts of money?"

Moved by curiosity, he returned there. Now it's important to know in advance that the brother was rich and didn't usually go to the home of the other brother. But since he realized that he could now use his brother, he went and said to him, "Where are you getting all this money from? Tell me because I need some money."

"What?" his brother responded. "You need some money? Before, when I was poor, you never came here because you were afraid that I might ask you for money, and now, thanks to God, I don't need money and you rush here and ask for some of mine. This just isn't right!"

But the brother was stubborn and wouldn't go away until he knew how

everything had come about. In the end he persuaded his brother to give him the cloth, and he left with it. After the cloth had been taken, the brother, who had previously had the cloth in his possession, could no longer get food to eat. Meanwhile, the miserly brother had the cloth cleaned and did not return it. When he called upon the cloth the first time, it gave him whatever he wanted, and he greedily ate everything. But the second time the cloth didn't provide him anything.

Now, one night the little nun appeared at the home of the poor brother and scolded him.

"So," she said, "you gave away the cloth even though I forbade you to do so, and now you have nothing to eat!"

When the father of the family saw her, he began to weep and said to the little nun, "I couldn't resist my brother. He was here every day, and since I couldn't bear hearing him constantly telling me how hungry he was, I gave him the cloth. Now, I beg you, please give me another cloth because I can no longer eat, and my family is starving from hunger."

Moved by pity, the little nun gave him a handkerchief and said, "Listen, you may use this to get food only for you and your family. However, don't give it away or let it be stolen, because I won't give you anything else."

The father promised that he wouldn't give it to anyone. At noon he spread the handkerchief on the table, and it gave him everything he wanted. But when his brother and sister-in-law learned about this, the brother said to his wife:

"I've heard they have a table set with magnificent things! This means that they've managed another kind of swindle. I'm going to see what's going on."

The miserly brother went to his brother's house and saw what had happened. Then he said to him, "Brother, I'm starving and have nothing to eat. Tell me what I should do and how you've accomplished all this."

His brother didn't want to tell him, but when he saw how stubborn his brother was, he simply couldn't stand up to his brother's stubbornness, and he gave him the handkerchief. As soon as he gave it, he and his family began to starve, and he said, "When they have the handkerchief, I can't say anything. When I have the handkerchief, I can't eat a thing and be happy. This must be God's will."

And he prayed that the little nun would reappear so that he could ask for something. And once again the little nun did appear and said to him: "You let the handkerchief be taken away from you? Now that you've given away both things, I don't want to see you anymore."

"Please don't abandon me. I won't do it anymore."

"Listen," the little nun said, "I have the cloth and handkerchief here, and


I'm giving them back to you. But I want you to have this stick which you're to use in case your brother comes to take the things that provide food. You just have to command the stick, and it will show you how to beat your brother and you yourself who gives him these things. Do you want to test it? *Get to work, stick!*"

And the stick began to beat everyone in sight, and they all wept and promised not to give away anything.

The tale's written, the tale's been told,  
Now you must tell yours, for mine is old.

*Collected by Vincenzo Giolongo at Polizzi-Generosa.*

### 31. THE EMPRESS TREBISONNA

nce upon a time there was a sailor who was married but childless, and he and his wife were desperate to have a baby boy or girl. They prayed so hard that at last the sailor's wife got pregnant and gave birth to a handsome little boy.

With this birth, however, the Wheel of Fortune turned against the father so that he could no longer catch even the smallest fish to feed his family. Now as Peppi—the name of the little boy—was growing older, his father said to him, "Son, there's no way I can support our family any longer. The only plan I can think of is for us to go to the Tardena Forest and cut some wood there."

So father and son went off to the forest. When they began cutting wood, they heard a voice cry out, "Hey, you thieves! What are you doing? You're taking all the wood from my forest!"

The sailor looked and saw a beautiful lady standing there.

"My lady," he said to her, "please forgive us. My son and I are dying of hunger, and we just came to get a little bit of wood for ourselves."

"Then here's what you must do," the lady answered. "Leave your son with me. I'll give you a sack of money in exchange, and then you're free to go."

At first the father cried, but then he accepted the money and departed, leaving his son behind him. When he was gone, the lady turned to the boy and asked, "What is your name?"

"Peppi."

"Well, Peppi, come inside this palace with me."

Once inside, the lady vanished, and Peppi found all the people of the court saying to him "We bow to your Majesty" and "At your Majesty's service!"

He kept turning around, scarcely imagining that he was the person they were addressing. Then Peppi entered a room where he found a large table prepared for him, and sat down and ate. When he was done, they asked:

“Would your Majesty like anything else? Would you like to smoke?”

“Yes, I’d like to smoke,” Peppi replied, and they gave him tobacco. When evening came, he was brought to Empress Trebissonna’s room for the night.

After a year had passed, Peppi felt the urge to see his father and mother again. So one day he said to the Empress, “Empress, I’d like to see my father and mother. Let me take a little trip, and then I’ll come back.”

“All right, Peppi, but we have to make a pact: I’ll let you go, but you can’t be gone for more than a year. If you stay even one day longer, woe to your family!”

Then she gave him a ring and said, “If you keep your word, this ring will help you in all situations.”

Peppi left and went straight to his father’s house. But the house was no longer there. He asked around and was told, “Who? That sailor who used to live there? Why he’s become a rich man now, a prince, and he lives in a palace!”

Peppi had him point out the palace, and he went there. A servant appeared, and Peppi said to him, “Tell the prince—(Indeed, the sailor was now a prince. That’s what money can do for you!)—that there’s a gentleman here who wishes to speak to him.”

The prince invited him in, and Peppi entered, but he gave no sign that he was the man’s son. He pretended instead that he was there on business. After they talked a bit, Peppi asked him if he had children.

“I did have a son once, and he was very dear to us. But the Empress Trebissonna wanted him, and so I had to leave him with her. I’ve never seen my son again, alive or dead. Oh that poor boy of mine!”

“But if you were to see your son again,” Peppi replied, “would you recognize him?”

“I think I might recognize him, except that now he must be grown up, for all I know.”

“Well, I am your son!” said Peppi.

Hearing this, his father embraced him and said, “My son! Now you’ll never have to leave me again. I’ve become very rich and have no one who will inherit my money except you. So all my wealth is yours!”

“There’s no need for money, father, because now I’m an emperor. The Empress Trebissonna has granted me only one year to be absent, and then I have to return. If I stay even one day longer, woe to my family. In fact, I have to leave right now and make a little journey before I start back.”

So he took leave of his father and started out. Soon he came to a kingdom where they were holding a jousting match. The king had a daughter he wanted to marry off, and he planned to give her to the best knight. Peppi, who had the ring of command, armed himself and mounted a horse to enter the joust, and he quickly proved himself the best contestant. But each time he was victorious, he would strangely withdraw and disappear. He won the first round and the second, and the king flew into a rage each time he saw this knight escaping. "If he comes again," the angry king ordered, "seize him so that I can see who this knight is who keeps winning and running."

So at the third round, when Peppi was about to leave, they seized him and brought him before his majesty.

"You keep winning and running away, and that's not right," the king said. "Why didn't you come to me and ask for my daughter's hand?"

"Your Majesty," Peppi answered, "why would I want your daughter? Your daughter isn't worthy even to wipe my wife's shoes!"

Hearing this, the king shouted to his guards, "Take this pretentious fellow and throw him in prison!" Then he turned to Peppi and said, "And you, either you have this wife of yours appear here in three days, or you're sentenced to death!"

When Peppi found himself in prison, he commanded his ring to have the Empress arrive and present herself to the king with all her court. The first day passed, the second day passed, and when the third day began, nobody appeared. Just as it reached the point where he was about to be put to death, they heard the roar of a mass of carriages, soldiers, and servants arriving.

"Who's coming? Who's coming?"

Peppi turned and looked: "It's my wife!"

They saw a huge carriage appear, and the king thought it must belong to the Empress. But no! These were the carriages of the knights and the servants. As each carriage passed, the king asked Peppi, "Is this your wife's carriage?"

"This carriage? Of course not!"

Finally the Empress Trebissona's carriage came into view. When the king and his court saw it, they were all wonderstruck. The Empress dismounted, and she was far grander than the king. All he could do was beg her pardon. Then she begged his pardon in behalf of her husband, and so they went on, each side begging the other's pardon. Finally, the Empress left, taking Peppi with her.

When they came to an open plain, the carriages suddenly vanished as well as the Empress, leaving Peppi all alone, solitary as a dog. Finding himself deserted, the poor fellow said, "What should I do?" and called his ring. But the ring wasn't there.

In the midst of this difficulty, he saw three men fighting.

"What are you fighting about?" he asked them.

"Sir, we have a problem. We've acquired three things, and we're fighting over who gets which one."

"What three things are they?"

"We have a purse that always stays full of money; a pair of boots that run like the wind; and a cloak that enables the person who wears it to become invisible. This man wants the cloak, that one wants the boots, and I want the purse, and we can't come to an agreement."

"All right," said Peppi, "just give me these three things, and I'll try them out to help you reach an agreement."

So they gave them to him—the purse, the boots, and the hat. When he put the cloak on, he said to them, "Can you see me now?"

"No."

"And you won't see me again, either."

And Peppi vanished. Soon he arrived at the Empress's palace in a powerful gust of wind that shattered the windows. When he entered, he found her bed and hid himself beneath it. As soon as the Empress was asleep, he began thumping on the mattress.

"Oh help, thieves, thieves!" she shouted, and all the ladies of the court came running, but they didn't see anyone. When they left, Peppi began thumping again, and the same thing happened. Finally, it dawned on the Empress what was happening, and she said, "All right, Peppi, you can come out from there now."

When he came out, she said to him, "You rascal, do you realize what you did to me? I told you not to stay more than a year, and you stayed too long. But now I forgive you for everything. We are husband and wife, and we shall enjoy our blessed happiness.

And so they lived on, in contentment and peace,

While we remain here, picking our teeth.

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 32. KING ANIMMULU

**I** have heard tell of a shoemaker who had three daughters, Peppa, Nina, and Nunzia, and they were all terribly poor. One day the father went out and scoured the countryside, but he could find nothing, not even a

penny. When he returned empty-handed, his wife said to him, "Good-for-nothing that you are, you haven't brought back a single penny!"

This upset him so much that he turned to his daughter Nunzia and said, "Let's go out and try to find some soup greens."

So off they went and arrived at the Commune.<sup>51</sup> As they began searching, Nunzia discovered a fat fennel plant and called out, "Oh father, father, look what I found! It's too big for me to pull up." So he went over, and when they pulled together, they saw a doorway with a young man looking out.

"Hey pretty girl, what are you looking for?" he said to Nunzia.

"And what do you think we're searching for? We're starving to death, and we came to pick some soup greens."

"I can make you rich," the young man said to the shoemaker. "Just leave your daughter with me, and I'll give you a sack of money."

At first the father was reluctant and said, "What? How can I leave my daughter, poor thing?" But at last he let himself be persuaded. So he left his daughter, took the money, and departed.

The maiden, who was left behind, went beneath the ground and discovered a beautiful house filled with riches, so elegantly furnished that she thought she was in heaven. She and the young man lived there together, but she was always weeping for her father.

Let's leave them for now and turn to the father, who was now able to eat meat all day long. While he was thus enjoying himself, his second daughter Peppa asked him, "Father, would you take me to see my sister?"

So they went to the same spot where the fennel was, and the same young man looked out, and the father and daughter entered. Once they were inside, Nunzia showed her sister all around the house, but there was one room she wouldn't let her see, because her husband kept the key to himself. Suddenly poor Nunzia didn't feel very well, and so she asked her sister, "Would you mind combing my hair?"

When her sister began combing her hair and started to undo the braid at the back of her head, she found a key attached there. Well, that sneaky sister said to herself, "How selfish my sister is! She's prevented me from seeing the whole house and kept the key to herself!"

So what did she do? As Nunzia was dozing off, her sister detached the key, went to the secret room, and opened it. Well, she found it filled with pretty young women, all doing embroidery. It turns out that Nunzia was expecting a baby, and they were making clothes for it. But the moment they saw her, their

51 The former fief of Salaparuta.

faces all grew yellow and pale and became exceedingly ugly. Then they vanished, some turning into lizards and some into snakes.

When Nunzia woke up, Peppa said to her, "Sister, you must allow me to leave at once, this very instant."

"Why?"

"I simply need to go."

"But won't you at least tell me why?"

"All right. I found the key in your hair, and I went and opened the door and found all those women."

"Oh sister of mine, you've completely destroyed me!" she said, as Peppa departed.

Just then Nunzia's husband returned, and the women in the room—who were fairies, of course—said to him, "You must send your wife away at once!"

He burst into tears and asked, "Why?"

"Just send her away immediately, we command you! Send her away!"

Oh, that poor unhappy maiden! Her husband was forced to go to her and say, "You must leave here at once, otherwise I am lost!"

Nunzia burst into tears, but he said to her, "Here, take this gray ball of yarn and tie it to this doorknob. When you come to the place where the yarn ends, that's where you must stay."

So she set out walking and traveled a great distance. Finally she arrived under the balcony of a very beautiful palace, which belonged to King Animmulu.

"Can you please offer me shelter, just a little hut where I can stay?" she called out.

"At this moment my lord and lady are seriously troubled," a servant woman answered her. "Their son has been stolen from them, and they have no way of finding him."

But Nunzia simply repeated her request: "Just a little hut, even a hen-house, just any place where I can stay?"

The servant took pity on her and went to the queen and said, "There's a poor unfortunate maiden here. Let us give her some shelter."

So they put her in the woodshed and brought her a bit of bread, seeing how famished she was. Well, the queen took a liking to this girl, and every morning she had coffee sent to her. But when she asked her, "Whose daughter are you?" her only answer was, "Ah, if only you knew what I've gone through!" and she wouldn't say another word.

It came to pass, after she had been in that house for some time, that one fine morning she gave birth to a baby boy. One of the queen's maids happened to go in her room that morning, and ran back to the queen saying, "Come quick,

your Majesty! That girl has had a beautiful baby boy, and he's the very image of your son."

Meanwhile—returning to the young prince—the fairies were saying to him, "How little you know! Why just this day your wife has given birth to a son. Would you like to go and visit him this evening?"

"By God, yes, please take me there!"

And in a few hours they were at her door. After they knocked, Nunzia asked,

"Who's there?"

"It's me, please open!" he answered.

As he entered, together with the fairies, the room became tapestried all in gold, the bed with its hangings became embroidered in gold, the baby's crib became all gold, and there was a light that made it seem like day. Music was everywhere, and the fairies were singing and dancing. Then the father began rocking his son in the cradle and sang to him:

"King Animmulu should know  
That his son has had a son.  
Swaddling of gold enfolds you,  
A golden cradle rocks you,  
And I would keep you all night long.  
Sleep, my love, to my cradle song."

All the while the fairies were dancing, and as they looked out the window, they sang this song:

"No roosters are crowing,  
No clock is striking;  
The hour has not yet come—not yet!"

Now let's leave them there and return to the queen. A maid came to her and shouted, "Oh my queen, you must come and see what is going on in the stranger's room! It's no longer a hen-house—it's all illuminated and looks like paradise! I hear singing that sounds like your son's voice. Just come and listen!"

So the queen went to listen. But they couldn't hear anything, and so they came back. Morning came. The fairies departed, and the queen herself came down to the hen-house to bring the maiden's coffee. "Are you willing to tell me who was here last night?"

"I really can't tell you," Nunzia replied. "But if you only knew who had been here!"

"Ah then," replied the queen, "could it have been my son?" And she

carried on so much that the maiden finally had to tell her the whole story, starting from where she went looking for soup greens and up to the present. When she finished, the queen said to her, "And so you are my son's wife," and began giving her hugs and kisses. Then she said, "Ask him how he can be freed from the spell."

"I'll ask him tonight."

When night-time arrived, the fairies came again at the same hour with the king's son. And again they all danced while he rocked his son in the cradle and sang to him: "King Animmulu should know . . ." And while the fairies were dancing, she said to her husband, "Ask the fairies how you can be freed from the spell."

"I know what can free me," he answered. "You must prevent the roosters from crowing, the clock from striking, and the morning bells from ringing. Moreover, you have to cover the whole street with a great dark canvas that looks like the sky, with the moon and stars in it, so that no one can see when dawn arrives. Then, just at the moment when the sun reaches mid-heaven, snatch away the canvas! The fairies will all turn into snakes and lizards and disappear."

In the morning the queen came to her and asked, "What did my son tell you?"

Then the maiden told her all that they had to do. So the king issued an edict: "Let no bells or clocks ring! Let all roosters be killed!"

Everything was prepared as it had to be. When evening came, the fairies again began to sing and make music, and the prince began his song: "King Animmulu should know . . ."

The fairies looked out the window and sang their song:

"No rooster is crowing,  
No clock is striking;  
The hour has not yet come—not yet!"

They spent the whole night dancing and frequently looked out the window, but seeing that it was still night-time, they continued their song: "No rooster is crowing . . ." The moment finally came when the sun had reached mid-heaven. At that moment the king's servants pulled away the canvas, and all at once the fairies turned into snakes and lizards and disappeared. Now the king's son and his wife could go to the royal palace and take their rightful place. They had a wedding with a beautiful banquet, and a lovely feast was had by all.

So they remained, happy and content,  
While we here cannot even pay our rent.

*Told by Rosa Cascio La Giucca and collected by Leonardo Greco in Salaparuta.*

## 33. TRIDICINU

**H**ere's a story they tell over and over again. Once there was a father with thirteen sons, and the smallest was called Tridicinu.<sup>52</sup> The father was unable to support his sons, but he did whatever he could to get soup on the family table. Their mother would call them to the table crying out, "First come, first served for hot soup." Tridicinu always got there first, and got the first portion of minestrone. For that reason, his brothers began to hate him and were ready to use any means to get rid of him.

Now it so happened that the king issued a proclamation to the whole city that whoever was brave enough to go and steal the Papa-ogre's winter blanket would receive a bushel of gold coins. Therefore the brothers went to the king and said, "Your Majesty, we have a brother called Tridicinu, who is brave enough to do this and more besides."

"Bring him to me at once!" replied the king.

So they brought Tridicinu to the king.

"Your Majesty," he asked, "how could I possibly steal the ogre's blanket? When he sees me, he'll eat me."

"Don't worry, just go!" said the king. "I know that you are brave, and you'll be able to perform this act of courage."

When Tridicinu arrived at the Papa-ogre's house, he found that the ogre had gone out, but the Mamma-ogre was in the kitchen. Tridicinu sneaked in quietly and hid under the bed. In the evening the Papa-ogre returned, ate dinner, and went to bed. As he lay down, he growled:

I smell the scent of human meat;  
Whoever I see, I'm ready to eat.

The Mamma-ogre answered, "Calm yourself and go to sleep. No one has come into this house."

When the ogre began to snore, Tridicinu gave a little tug on his blanket. The ogre woke up.

"Who's there?"

"Meow! Meow!" answered Tridicinu, pretending it was the cat. The Mamma-ogre clapped her hands with a "Scat! Scat!" and then went back to sleep beside her ogre husband

At this point Tridicinu gave a huge tug, snatched the blanket, and ran off.

52 From the word for thirteen, *tridici* (Ital. *tredici*). An English equivalent might be "Thirteen."

The ogre heard him running, recognized him in the dark, and said, "I know who you are—you're Tridicinu, and no doubt about it!"

Some time went by, and the king issued another proclamation announcing that whoever could get the ogre's horse and bring it to him would receive a bushel of gold coins. Tridicinu offered himself again, and this time he asked the king for a silken ladder and a sack of honey-cakes. Tridicinu set out with these items and arrived at the ogre's house at night. He entered without being heard and went to the stable. The horse whinnied when he saw him, but Tridicinu gave him a honey-cake and said, "See how sweet this is? If you come with me, my master will supply you with these forever." Then he gave him another and said, "Just let me mount you, and I'll show you how to go there." And so he mounted the horse, feeding him honey-cakes as they went, and delivered him to the king's stable.

Now the king issued still another proclamation that he would give *two* bushels of gold coins to whoever brought him the bolster from the ogre's bed. Tridicinu said, "Your Majesty, who could ever do this? That bolster is full of little bells, and the ogre sleeps so lightly that even a breath of air will wake him up."

"That's not my concern," said the king. "I must have it at all costs."

So off went Tridicinu and managed to hide himself under the ogre's bed again. When it was midnight, he stretched out his hand, gently . . . gently . . . but the little bells all started ringing.

"Who's there?" said the ogre.

"It's nothing," answered his wife. "Maybe it's the wind that's making the bells ring."

But now the ogre's suspicions were aroused. He only pretended to sleep, but kept his ears open. Tridicinu stretched out his hand again, and *bam!* the ogre grabbed hold of him.

"Caught you this time!" he said. "Now just watch how I'll make you cry for all you're worth!"

Then he threw Tridicinu into a barrel and began feeding him with figs and raisins. After some time went by, the ogre said, "Stick out your finger, Tridicinu, so I can see how you've fattened up."

But Tridicinu had found a mouse's tail, and he stuck that out instead of his finger.

"Oh how skinny you are," said the ogre, "and also a bit smelly! Eat, my son, take more figs and raisins so you'll fatten up quickly."<sup>53</sup>

More days passed, and the ogre again asked him to show his finger. This

53 The idiom "to be nourished on raisins and figs" means to be well-fed and fat.

time Tridicinu stuck out the tip of a spindle. "Poor boy, still thin as a rail, are you? Well, eat some more so you'll soon get fat."

By the end of a month, Tridicinu had run out of things to substitute and had no choice but to show his own finger. The ogre began shouting for joy: "Hooray! He's finally nice and fat!" The ogress came running, and he said to her, "Quick, my dear wife, start up the oven and keep it hot for three days while I go and round up all our relatives. This Tridicinu will make for a glorious feast!"

The ogress spent three days heating up the oven, and at the end of this time she took Tridicinu out of the barrel and said, "Come here, Tridicinu, and look, we're about to roast the lamb."

But he read her thoughts,<sup>54</sup> and when he was close to the oven, he said, "Oh ogress, what's that nasty black thing I see deep in the corner?"

The ogress bent down a little but saw nothing.

"Bend a little closer," said Tridicinu, "so you can see it."

When she bent a little further, Tridicinu grabbed her by the feet, threw her into the oven, and covered it with a heavy slab. When she was fully cooked, he took her out all neat and clean, divided her at the waist, cut up her legs into small portions and set them out on the table. Then he set her torso with her arms and head on her bed under the sheets and tied one string to her chin and another behind her brow.

When the ogre arrived with his guests, they found the plates all set out on the table. Then they went to the bed and asked, "Madam ogress, would you like to eat?"

Tridicinu tugged the string and the ogress raised her head to say "no."<sup>55</sup>

"What's the matter, are you tired?"

Tridicinu from under the bed tugged the other string, making her nod down for "yes." One of the guests, however, went up close, moved away the sheets, and discovered that the ogress was dead and only half a body.

"We've been tricked! We've been tricked!" he shouted, and everybody came running to the bed. In all this hubbub and confusion, Tridicinu managed to escape and make his way back to the king, taking with him the bed-bolster and the best of the ogre's possessions.

When all this was accomplished, the king said to Tridicinu, "Listen, Tridicinu, to complete all your acts of bravery, I want you to bring back to me the Papa-ogre himself, in person, alive and well."

54 The original has a more striking idiom, *si mangiau li pinseri d'idda*, he "ate her thoughts."

55 In Sicilian gestural language, a backward tilt of the head signifies "no."

Tridicinu's first reply was, "Your Majesty, really!" But immediately he recovered himself and said, "I'll take care of it."

So he had a very strong chest made, dressed himself like a monk with a long fake beard down to here, went up the hill where the ogre lived, and stood in front of his house. Then he began to shout, calling the ogre and saying, "You know that rascal Tridicinu? He just killed our chief monk. If you manage to catch him, shut him up in this chest."

At these words the ogre came out and said, "Yes, I want to help you catch that murderer! You have no idea what he has done to me, that criminal!" And he told him the whole story.

"But how will we manage it?" said the false monk. "I don't know what Tridicinu looks like. Do you know?"

"Of course I do."

"Well then, tell me, how tall is he?"

"About my height."

"Since that's the case," said Tridicinu the false monk, "let's try out whether you fit inside this chest. Because if you can fit in here, then so can he."

"Fine," said the ogre, and he got inside the chest.

"Take a good look, ogre, to see if there are any openings," Tridicinu said.

"No, there aren't any."

"Wait a minute, while I see that it closes properly, and that it's not too heavy to carry."

Tridicinu closed the chest and nailed it shut. Then he loaded it on his back and began running toward the city. The ogre called out, "That's enough!"

But Tridicinu just ran faster, laughing, and to mock the ogre he sang a little song:

"Tridicinu is my name,  
And I carry you on my back.  
I've gotten the upper hand, and now  
I'm taking you to the king."

When they reached the king, he had the ogre put in chains with iron bonds on his hands and feet that chafed his bones for the rest of his miserable life. As for Tridicinu, he gave him all the riches and treasures he could possibly give, and wanted him forever at his side as a brave fellow of the very first rank.

So Tridicinu lived on, in contentment and peace,  
While we just sit here, picking our teeth.

*Told by Francesca Leto to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

### 34. THE ENCHANTED HORSE

Once upon a time there was a father who had three sons. Since death was approaching, the father wanted to make out his will. He left his horns to the eldest, his property to the middle son, and his chest of money to the youngest. When the two older sons heard the will, they wanted to have it annulled because they thought they had been wronged, but the lawyer convinced them that their father intended to include all the cattle with the horns, and all his fields with his property so they had nothing to complain about. Persuaded by the lawyer's words, they were satisfied, but they still kept a jealous eye on their younger brother.

One day the two brothers went to a merchant, and they gambled with him until they lost everything that their father had left them. Since they were now poor and a bit crazy, they tried to persuade their younger brother to gamble so that he would also lose all he had, just as they had done. But their brother kept responding to their suggestion, "Do you know when I'll go and gamble? I'll go when I dream a certain dream."

One night he dreamt about his mother who said to him, "Go and gamble, my son. Tell the merchant:

My mother's hen had one big leg  
And this hen-a-leg she laid an egg.  
And from the egg popped out a chick  
Which grew until it was a mighty cock,  
And when the cock began to sing, it cried:  
'Get out, mister merchant, this shop is mine.'"<sup>56</sup>

So the young man did exactly as she said and in no time won all the merchant's money. When his brothers saw that he even had more money than before, they began hating him more than ever, and they did all they could to get rid of him.

In this country there was a king who had become a bit obsessed because he had seen a tree in the middle of the sea with his binoculars. Since this tree had golden hair entwined on its branches, he began searching for someone who would get the golden hair for him. Once they heard about this, the two older

<sup>56</sup> See the first tale in the collection, "The Tale Told Time and Again," and the variant in the note to the tale. There is a similar incident and riddle. The merchant loses all his property because the young man is creative and cunning.

brothers decided immediately to go to the king and tell him that they had a brother who believed he could go and fetch the golden hair.

So the king summoned the young man and told him to depart immediately to fetch the hair or he would lose his head. The poor young man became desperate and didn't know what to do. Fortunately, he had a horse, and when this horse saw how disturbed he was, it asked him what was wrong. So the young man told him everything.

"Don't be discouraged," the horse said. "Go to the king and have him give you a bag of grated bread, some grated cheese, and twenty large nails. Then come back here, and I'll take care of things."

The young man did as he was told. Once he returned with all the stuff, he mounted the horse and departed. After they had traveled some distance, they came upon a great number of ants, and the horse said to him, "Throw them the bag with bread because these ants could help you one day."

The young man threw them the bread. Further ahead he found a bush with many doves, and the horse said to him, "Throw them the bag with the grated cheese because these doves could help you one day."

And the young man threw them the cheese. Finally they came to the sea and saw the tree that the king had talked about. The lions that guarded the tree happened to be sleeping, and the horse said, "Listen to me. I want you to knock the nails into the tree and climb it. Take the hair, and if the lions wake up while you're climbing down, throw the nails into the mouths of the lions when they open them."

The young man climbed the tree, took the hair, and dealt with the lions as the horse had told him to do. As soon as he had the golden hair, he returned to the king, who was overjoyed as soon as he saw the hair, and he gave him a ton of money.

But what do you think happened a few days later? Well, the king sent for him again and told him that he now wanted the queen with the golden hair! This time the young man really didn't know how he'd get out of this jam.

"My horse," he said, "you must help me now! Do you know how I can find the queen with the golden hair?"

"Why are you so upset by such a little thing?" the horse replied. "Go to the king and tell him to give you a golden blanket, a golden saddle, and a golden bridle."

The young man fetched everything, got on the horse, and they departed.

As he was riding, the horse said to him, "Listen, as soon as we arrive at the sea, it will divide. Then you must be brave enough to jump across to the other side with me. Once we are there, we'll find a court made entirely of gold. You'll enter and see a golden palace. Hide yourself, and you'll see that the

queen's twelve chambermaids will begin to take rides on me. But as soon as the queen herself is in the saddle, jump onto my rump, and we shall carry her away."

And this is indeed what the young man did. When the queen got on the saddle, he was ready and jumped on the rump of the horse, and they carried her away. At a certain point she took her diamonds and threw them into the sea. Then at the bush with the doves, she threw her veil, and as they passed the ants, she threw her gold necklace.

When they finally arrived at the palace, the king went berserk as soon as he caught a glimpse of her. But she said to him, "You can only touch me when you retrieve the diamonds that I threw into the sea."

When the king heard this, he had the young man summoned and ordered him to go and fetch the diamonds. The unfortunate young man had no choice but to turn to his horse and depart. The horse carried him to the fish that they had saved on their way to get the queen, and he found the fish in the same place where it had been before.<sup>57</sup>

"My beautiful fish," the young man asked, "could you help fetch the diamonds that the queen threw into the sea?"

"Why not? I saw a bunch of fish fighting over who would get them, and I'll take them away."

And within seconds the diamonds were in the hands of the young man. When the queen saw them, she said, "Do you think that you're done? Now you must bring back my veil."

"My horse," the young man said, "did you hear what the queen wants? Let's go and fetch it."

They departed and found the doves in the bush.

"My doves," the young man said, "do you know where the queen's veil is to be found?"

"Here it is!" they said and gave it to him.

But the queen was still not content. She wanted to have the necklace brought to her. Armed with the patience of a saint, the young man departed on his horse to fetch it, and the ants helped him and gave it to him.

When the queen saw him return, she said to him, "Now that you've brought me everything, you must sit in a boiling kettle for three days and three nights!"

Upon hearing this, the young man went to his horse and wept as he told him what had happened.

57 The young man and the horse had probably done the fish a favor on their way to fetch the queen, but the narrator forgot to mention this episode.

"Don't be frightened," the horse responded. "Listen to me. I want you to get on my back, and when you ride me, make me sweat. Then gather together all my sweat and rub your entire body with it. Once you've done that, jump into the kettle, and you'll see that you'll emerge more handsome than you were before."

The young man did what he said. When the king saw him emerge from the kettle, he asked him, "How did you do it?"


"How did I do it? I rubbed grease all over my body."

Then the queen said to him, "King, why don't you do this, too?"

The king let himself be persuaded, but he burned up like straw. The queen was now alone, and there's no need for me to tell you what happened because you can imagine what she did. She married the young man, and they remained happy and content. But a lot of good it does either you or me!

*Collected by Di Martino in Noto.*

## 35. THE STORY OF A QUEEN

nce upon a time there was a king with seven daughters, who always stood on the balcony. It seemed to their father that the people might disapprove of this, and he scolded them.

"What's the matter, Papa?" one of his daughters responded. "Can't we even stand on the balcony?"

"No, daughter. That's not proper. Stay inside. If you don't, I'll lock you up behind bars and give you only bread and water."

Since his daughters wouldn't listen to a thing he said, their father had them locked up behind bars. After they passed some time in isolation, the sisters had a discussion among themselves.

"What are we going to do? We've got to think of something because we won't be able to live off pieces of bread and drops of water for very long!"

"You're right," another sister said. "Let's discard our women's garments and put on men's clothes. We'll get a tailor to come here and make clothes for us, and at three thirty we'll mount our horses and ride into the city."

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" the others said.

They called for a tailor, and once they gave him their measurements, he made men's clothes for them. Then they dug an underground tunnel, and after dressing themselves in men's clothes, they went through the tunnel, mounted their horses, and fled. At exactly four o'clock, their father arrived with bread and water and couldn't find his daughters.

"Guards! Guards! Guards! I've been tricked!" he cried out.

But what were the guards and servants to do? In the meantime, the sisters had dismounted and were walking along a road when night came. Soon they saw a light and got back on their horses and rode toward a large farm. Once they arrived, they knocked at the door.

"Oh, cavalier!" they called out to the owner of the farm.

A sorcerer appeared at the window, and they mistook him for a cavalier.

"Why have you come to my house?" he asked.

"Ahh! Please be so kind as to let us stay here tonight. We're tired from our journey."

"All right. Tristana, open the door for them, and let these poor unfortunates enter. But first help them get off their horses and give the beasts some barley. Then I want you to provide these poor maidens with something to eat so they can refresh themselves."

(I forgot to mention that they had already taken off their men's clothes and put on women's clothes.)

Then the sorcerer turned to the princesses and said, "I'll put you with my daughters. There are seven of them like you, and you can stay together."

After they had gotten off their horses, the princesses went upstairs where they found things to eat, and they washed themselves. Toward midnight Tristana, the sorcerer's wife, turned to him and said, "You know, husband, I've been thinking about eating them?"

Meanwhile, one of the sisters, who was very cunning and knew how to use her head, overheard her.

"Sisters," she alerted them, "we must escape. If not, we're lost. I just heard that the sorcerer's wife wants to eat us."

The sisters began to discuss the situation among themselves, and when Tristana heard them, she said, "Why are you talking?"

"We're wiped out from the journey," they said. "We can't manage to sleep."

Right before midnight the sorcerer and his wife returned to them. However, they approached the bed of their own daughters, and thinking that it was the bed of the seven strangers,<sup>58</sup> they ate their own daughters. Meanwhile, one of the princesses turned to the others and said, "Ignazia, let's get out of here. If not, we'll soon be dead!"

They went down the stairs very slowly, mounted their horses, and slipped away. They traveled until there was daylight, and they continued traveling

58 The narrator has forgotten to explain that the sisters switched places with the daughters of the ogres.

until they arrived at a city called Mienna.<sup>59</sup> Soon after their arrival, they entered an inn.

“What’s there to eat?”

“There’s everything, whatever your lords<sup>60</sup> command. But first you must tell me, who you are. Are you sons of kings or sons of cavaliers?”

However they said nothing. They ate, mounted their horses, and rode off to Genova.<sup>61</sup> What did they do in Genova? They rented a palace, for they had plenty of money, and they remained there. Since they were all beautiful daughters of a king, they had a true royal bearing and thus many cavaliers came and proposed to them. As each one of the princesses found the husband she wanted, she got married. The eldest took a count, the second a lord,<sup>62</sup> the third a cavalier, the fourth a gentleman, the fifth, a wealthy farmer, the sixth, I’m not sure (let’s say a good artisan), and the last, who was the most clever of all, took a king. Soon they were all settled and looking after their affairs, and one of the brothers-in-law said to the king:

“Your majesty, it’s true that you’re a king, but you don’t know the talents that your wife has, and there’s nobody in the world who knows them.”

“Why are you saying this?”

“Because I know that she’s confident she could go and get the ring of the sorcerer’s wife.”

After hearing this, the king ordered his wife to go and get the ring of the sorcerer’s wife.

“Well, if you want to send me to my death, so be it,” she responded. “I’ll fetch the ring of the sorcerer’s wife. Just give me a horse and barley, and something for me to eat, and I’ll go. But listen carefully to what I say to you. If I have not returned in a year, a month, and a day, you can be sure that I’m dead!”

The poor maiden began her journey, and soon after she arrived at the sorcerer’s farmhouse, she put the horse in the stable and went up into the castle.

“Oh, donna Tristana, will you let me stay here tonight?”

“Yes, my daughter,” Tristana responded. “But I’ve just experienced some terrible treachery. I was tricked into eating my own daughters. So who in her right mind would want to come now and stay in my house?”

<sup>59</sup> Vienna.

<sup>60</sup> The sisters have put on men’s clothes again.

<sup>61</sup> Time and distance in fairy tales are magical so that the princesses can easily and quickly move from Vienna to Genova.

<sup>62</sup> A British lord, that is, a rich and handsome man.

"What does all this have to do with me? I want to regard you as my own mother and father," she said, turning to the sorcerer.

It seemed all right to the sorcerer and his wife to let her stay there, especially because they had nobody. They gave her some pigeons and chickens to eat in order to fatten her up. Five months passed, and Tristana said, "Agatuzza! Agatuzza! Just look at how large you've grown!"

When his wife uttered these words, the sorcerer said, "You know what I'm thinking, Tristana? Heat up the oven for seven nights and seven days, and then cook the girl for me and put her on a plate, and when I arrive, I'll eat her."

And he meant the poor girl.

When the time came, the sorcerer's wife said, "Come here, Agatuzza, and watch how I heat up the oven."

"Ahh, mamma mia!" responded the maiden as she approached. "I've never seen how you do such things. So why don't you look into the oven first?"

The sorcerer's wife went over to the oven, and the princess grabbed her from behind, and as she pushed her into the oven, she quickly took off the ring from her finger. Later, she pulled the sorcerer's wife from the oven and put her on top of the table. Then she put a long wooden beam on the bed and covered it with a blanket to make it seem the sorcerer's wife was sick. Immediately after she mounted her horse and returned to the king.

When the sorcerer returned and saw that the table was set, he cried out, "Oh! Tristana, what's the matter? Are you sick? Don't you want any? Look how nice and fat she is! Why don't you want to eat any?"

Without waiting for a reply, he sat down and ate. Then he went to the bed and discovered the wooden beam.

"I've been tricked! I've eaten my own wife!"

A good deal of time passed before the princess reached the royal palace.

"Oh, my wife, how long has it been since I've seen you! It's been one year, one month and a day!"

"Oh, you nasty dog!" his wife responded. "You wanted to send me to the guillotine! You wanted my death!"

The brothers-in-law were jealous and didn't know how to get rid of this queen whom they couldn't stand. So they went to the king and said, "Now, brother-in-law, you're the king. You've got the ring from your wife, but you're missing the sorcerer's horse. There's no one in all of Sicily and in the entire world who has a horse like this one."

After the queen heard this, she said to her husband, "Do you really want me to go there? Well then, I'll gladly ride to my death. Give me something to eat and something for the horse, and I'll go and get him."

They embraced, and she kissed her husband.

"If I'm not back in a year, a month, and a day, you can be sure that I'm dead."

Off she ran, and at the end of a year, she arrived at the sorcerer's castle. Now it was impossible to capture the sorcerer's horse unless you first mounted it, but when she tried to do this, the horse cried out: "Master, help! Master, help me!"

"Be quiet!" she responded

But the horse neighed.

"Watch out!" the queen said. "I've got a stick, and I'll give you a good beating if you're not quiet!"

In short, the queen kept talking and doing things until she had the bridle on the horse, and then she was able to mount it. As she was leaving the stable, however, the sorcerer rushed to the window and saw what was happening.

"Oh! You wicked, godless thing! What are you doing to me?" the sorcerer cried out and then he said, "If you give me back the horse, I'll give you everything I own."

"Hey, sorcerer, I'm the one who made you kill your daughters, and I'm the one who stole the ring from your wife's finger!"

"Please, give me back my horse!"

"No, the horse must come with me to my palace."

As soon as she arrived at the palace, she immediately sent news to the king. Then an escort of soldiers arrived to take charge of the magnificent horse. When the king saw his wife, he embraced and kissed her. Soon all the brothers-in-law came to the palace.

"Long live the queen! Long live the queen! This is the best horse in all of Sicily!" they cried out. "But do you know what you're missing? The instrument that speaks by itself."

The capricious king told this to his wife. She, who had the courage for two, left on her horse and with food, saying "If I'm not back in a year, a month, and a day, you can be sure that I'm dead."

Meanwhile, the instrument said to the sorcerer, "Pay attention because the maiden who had you eat your daughters, took the ring, and robbed your horse, is coming to take me now. Pay attention!"

As the maiden came toward the sorcerer's house, the instrument spied on her for the sorcerer:

"Where is she now?"

"She's half way here."

"Where is she now?"

"At the end of the road."

"Where is she now?"

"At the gate."

"Where is she now?"

"On the stairs."

"Where is she now?"

"On the last step."

As she mounted the last step, the sorcerer grabbed her by the hair and lifted her up.

"Ahh, you've walked into your death!" he cried.

"All right, I know that I'm dead," she said. "Give me something to eat so I can become fat. Right now I'm like a skinny chicken, like a dog."

"All right. I'll fatten you up for two months, and then we'll see to it," the sorcerer said and turned to his new wife. "Give her something to eat because I have to go. I'll return later."

After he left, the young queen said to the wife, "I'd like a favor. I want to sleep in this bed for a while."

So she went to bed and pretended to sleep. Instead she seized the instrument, mounted her horse, and departed. Just at that moment the sorcerer came.

"Ahh! She's even taken the instrument. I told you, bumbling wife, to keep an eye on that maiden!"

Meanwhile, as the young queen approached the king's palace, he was glad to send soldiers to escort her with the instrument. Afterward, there were celebrations and parties, and once again the brothers-in-law came.

"King, it's true that you have the ring, the horse, and the instrument. But to be really happy you should send your wife to fetch the sorcerer alive. That would be something spectacular."

"All right, you nasty dog," his wife responded when he told her what he wanted. "You let yourself be persuaded by anyone's words. You yield to my sisters, but I hope I can avoid death and overcome even this."

"No, wife, I'm not a nasty dog, and I don't want you to die."

"Stop all the chattering and give me a pair of trousers from Calabria, a board, a hatchet, four tables, and some penny nails."

Then she mounted her horse and went to the sorcerer's castle. As she approached it, she took out the hatchet from her belt and began to dig a hole in front of the castle. Right at that moment the sorcerer appeared at the window.

"What are you doing?" he asked the young queen, who was dressed as a man.

"There's supposed to be a pool of water here. I want to make a water geyser to amuse the sorcerer."

After she reached the depth of a yard and a half, the sorcerer came down from the castle to look at the hole. When he was approaching, his feet slipped, and he fell down into the hole.

"Oww! Oww!" he cried out. "I've broken something. How am I going to get out of here?"

"Try to get on these tables," the young queen said. "I'll pull you up on them. Let me put four nails there. Otherwise you'll fall backwards."

After she nailed the tables into the form of a box, she said, "Get up into it and tell me if there are rays of light."

"There's some light."

The young queen hit another nail into the box.

"Is there still light?"

"No!"

"Now," she said, "let's see how we're going to get you on the horse."

She took the box and pulled it with a cord on to the back of the horse. Then she traveled a long time and brought the box to the royal palace and presented it to the king. Imagine how happy he was! The instrument sounded the signal when the queen arrived. When the box was unloaded, they put the sorcerer in chains and let out four lions that tore him to pieces.

Agatuzza was very happy about her victory. Her sisters and brothers-in-law had sour faces because they had tried to get rid of her in so many wicked ways. All in vain. The king remained with his wife, the ring, the horse and the instrument, and we are still here without a cent.

*Told by Vincenzo Graffagnino, a peasant, in the house of Professor Vincenzo Di Giovanni, in Salaparuta.*

## 36. THE HERB-GATHERER'S DAUGHTERS

**T**here was once an herb-gatherer called Uncle Peppi, who had three daughters, and they earned their living by spinning. One day their father died and left them all alone in the world. Now the king often went through the streets at night, listening at the doors to hear what the people said about him. One evening, he stopped at the door of the house where the three sisters lived and listened to them having an argument.

"If I were the wife of the royal butler," the eldest said, "I would give the whole court some water to drink out of a single glass, and there would be some water left over."

"If I were the wife of the keeper of the royal wardrobe," the second sister

said, "I would make clothes for all the servants with one piece of cloth and still have some cloth left over."

"If I were the king's wife," the youngest asserted, "I would bear him three children—two sons with apples in their hands and a daughter with a star on her forehead."

The king went back to his palace, and the next morning sent for the sisters. When they appeared before the king, they were bewildered.

"Don't be frightened," the king said. "I just want you to tell me what you were discussing last night."

The oldest turned to him and said, "Your majesty, I said if I were the wife of the royal butler, I would give the whole court some water to drink out of a single glass, and there would be some water left over."

"Prove it to me!" the king commanded and called for a glass of water. "I want the proof!"

Well, she took the glass and first gave the servants some water to drink and then everyone at court, and there was some left over.

"Bravo! You've passed the test!" cried the king, and then he summoned the butler. "This man is your husband. Now it's your turn," the king said to the next sister.

"Your majesty, I said that if I were the wife of the keeper of the royal wardrobe, I would make clothes for all the servants with one piece of cloth and still have some cloth left over."

"Prove it to me!" the king exclaimed and ordered a piece of cloth to be brought. So the young girl immediately cut out garments for all the servants and had some cloth left over.

"Bravo! You've passed!" cried the king, and then he called the royal wardrobe keeper and said, "This man is now your husband."

Finally, he turned to the youngest sister and said, "Now it's your turn."

"Your majesty," she responded. "I said that if I were the king's wife, I would bear him three children—two sons with apples in their hands, and a daughter with a star on her forehead."

"If what you say is true," the king stated, "you shall be queen. But if it isn't, you shall die," and he married her right away.

In very little time the two older sisters became envious of the youngest.

"Look," they said, "she's to be queen, and we must be servants!"

Soon the envy turned to hate.

Meanwhile the queen became pregnant, and two months before she was to give birth, the king declared war against another kingdom and had to depart. But first he placed one of his men in charge of everything and said: "My wife is about to give birth. If she has three children—two sons with apples in their

hands and a daughter with a star on her forehead—she is to be respected as queen. If not, you're to write to me, and I'll tell you what to do."

Then he set out for the war.

Well, who were the people the queen trusted most? They were her sisters, and when she had great labor pains, she called them, and they came to her. However, the sisters had arranged with the midwife that, when the queen gave birth, she was to cart the babies away and replace them with puppies. Indeed, the queen gave birth to three children—two boys with apples in their hands and one girl with a star on her forehead. After she recovered from the labor pains of giving birth, the queen turned to the midwife and said, "Old woman, what are my babies like?"

"They're three puppies, your majesty."

"Three puppies! But I heard three babies crying!"

"It was your imagination, your majesty."

The midwife had taken away the three innocent babes. So, the man who had been placed in charge of everything wrote to the king: "Your majesty, the queen gave birth to three puppies. Please write and tell me what I'm to do."

When the king received the news, he wrote back: "Take care of her for two weeks. Then send her to the treadmill."

Now let us leave the king and return to the midwife who had carried the babies outside.

"I'll let the dogs eat them up," she said and left them alone.

While they lay out in the open, three fairies passed by and cried out, "Oh, how beautiful these children are!"

They bent over them, and while they were kneeling, one of the fairies said, "What gift shall we give these children? I shall give them a deer that will nurse all three."

"And I shall grant them a purse, and whenever they reach inside, it will always be full of money."

"And I," said the third fairy, "shall give them a ring that will change its color whenever misfortune should strike one of them."

After saying these words, they departed, and the deer began to nurse the children who grew by leaps and bounds while their father was at war. A year passed, two, then three, until they were fully grown. Then the fairy who had given them the deer came and said, "Now that you're all grown up, why should you stay here any longer?"

"Very well," said one of the brothers, "I shall go to the city and rent a house."

"Make sure," the deer remarked, "that you rent a house opposite the royal palace."

So they all went to the city and rented a palace. Since they had plenty of money, they bought chairs, beds, and sofas. Indeed they furnished the house it as if they had been royalty and had coaches, horses, and everything they needed. When their aunts saw these young people, you can imagine their fright!

"They're alive!" they said. It was impossible to mistake them, for there were the apples in the boys' hands, and a star on the girl's forehead. So they summoned the midwife and said to her, "Old woman, what does this mean? Are our nephews and niece alive?"

The midwife went to the window and watched until she saw the two brothers depart. Then, when she knew the maiden was alone, she went over as if to make a visit to the new house. As she entered, she said, "How are things going for you, my daughter? You're happy here, aren't you? You seem to have everything, but do you know what would make you truly happy? It's the Dancing Water. If your brothers love you, they will fetch it for you!"

The midwife remained a while longer and then departed. When one of the brothers returned, the maiden said to him, "Ah! My brother, if you really love me, you'll go and get the Dancing Water."

"Of course, I'll go, my sister."

The next morning he mounted a splendid horse and departed. On his way, he met a hermit, who asked him, "Where are you going, cavalier?"

"I'm going to fetch the Dancing Water."

"You're going to your death, my son. But keep on traveling until you meet a hermit older than I."

He continued his journey until he met another hermit, who asked, "Where are you going, cavalier?"

"I'm going to fetch the Dancing Water."

"You're going to your death, my son, but keep on traveling until you meet a hermit much older than I am."

So, he continued his journey until he met another hermit, older than the other two. He had a white beard that came down to his feet, and he told the young man: "You're going to your death, but I have some instructions for you. Do you see that mountain over there? You must climb to the top where you will find a great plain and a house with a beautiful gate. In front of the gate you will see four giants with swords in their hands. Pay attention. Don't make a mistake. If you do, it will be the end of you! When the giants have their eyes closed, do not enter. When their eyes are open, feel free to enter. Then you will come to a door. If you find it open, don't enter. If you find it shut, push it open and enter. Then you will find four lions. If they have their

eyes shut, don't enter. When their eyes are open, enter, and you will find the Dancing Water."

The young man took leave of the hermit, mounted his horse, and rode off. Meanwhile, his sister kept looking at the ring constantly to see whether the stone had changed color. Since it remained the same, she was relieved.

A few days after leaving the hermit the young man arrived at the top of the mountain and saw the palace with the four giants standing before it. They had their eyes shut, and the door was open.

"No," said the young man. "That won't do."

And so he waited and kept on the lookout. When the giants opened their eyes, and the door closed, he entered and waited for the lions to open their eyes and entered the next room, where he found the Dancing Water and filled his bottles with it. Then he escaped when the lions again opened their eyes.

Now let us leave him on his journey home and turn to the aunts, who were delighted because their nephew did not return. However, within a few days he reappeared and embraced his sister. Then they had two golden basins made and put the Dancing Water into them and watched the water leap from one basin to the other. When the aunts saw it, they exclaimed, "Ah! How did he manage to get that water?"

Enraged, they called the midwife, who again waited until the sister was alone and then visited her.

"You see," she said, "how beautiful the Dancing Water is! But do you know what you want now? The Singing Apple."

After she departed, the brother, who had brought the Dancing Water, returned, and his sister said to him, "My brother, do you know what you must fetch for me if you love me? You must fetch the Singing Apple."

"I understand, sister, and I'll go and get it."

The next morning he mounted his horse and went straight to the first hermit, who said to him, "Where are you going, cavalier?"

"I'm going to fetch the Singing Apple."

"You're heading for trouble, my son. But keep on traveling until you meet a hermit older than I."

So he continued his journey until he encountered the second hermit who said, "Where are you going, cavalier?"

"I'm going to fetch the Singing Apple."

"It's quite a task to get the Singing Apple. So listen to what you must do. First you must climb the mountain. Beware of the giants, the door, and the lions. Then you will find a little door and a pair of scissors in it. If the scissors are open, enter. If they are closed, do not risk it. Now get out of here!"

The young man continued on his way, and after he climbed the mountain,

he entered the palace and found the situation favorable. When he saw the scissors open, he went into a room and saw a wonderful tree on top of which was an apple. He climbed up and tried to pick the apple, but the top of the tree swayed back and forth. He waited until it was still for a moment, grabbed hold of the branch, and picked the apple. Everything was again favorable. So he mounted his horse and rode home. All along the way, the apple kept making sounds!

His aunts had again been very glad because their nephew had been absent so long. However, when they saw him return, they felt as though the house had fallen on them. Once again they summoned the midwife, and again she visited the young woman when her brothers were not there.

"See how beautiful they are, the Dancing Water and the Singing Apple!" she remarked. "But you should see the Talking Bird, and then you will have seen all there is to see!"

"Very well," said the young girl. "We'll see whether my brother will get it for me."

When her brother came, she asked, "My brother, if you really love me, you'll go and fetch the Talking Bird for me?"

"Of course, sister," and he mounted his horse and departed. When he met the first hermit, the old man asked, "Where are you going, cavalier?"

"I'm going to fetch the Talking Bird."

"You're heading for trouble, my son. But keep on traveling until you meet a hermit older than I."

He traveled onward until he came to the second hermit who asked him where he was going and sent him on to a third one, who said to him: "Now I'll tell you what you have to do. You're to climb the mountain and enter the palace. You will find many statues. Then you will come to a garden where you will find a basin in the middle, and on the basin is the Talking Bird. If it should say anything to you, do not respond. Pick a feather from the bird's wing, dip it into the basin, and touch all the statues with it. Keep your eyes open, and everything will go well."

Since the young man was already very familiar with the way, he was soon in the palace. He found the garden and the bird, which immediately exclaimed, "What's the matter, cavalier? Have you come for me? Have you come to pick my feather? You won't get it. Your aunts have sent you to your death, and you must remain here. Your mother has been sent to the treadmill."

"My mother is in the treadmill?" cried the young man, and no sooner did he utter these words than he became a statue like all the others.

When the sister looked at her ring, she saw that it had become misty.

"Ah!" she exclaimed.

So now her other brother departed, and when he came to the first hermit, the old man asked, "Where are you going, cavalier?"

"I'm going to fetch the Talking Bird."

"You're heading for your death, my son. But keep on traveling until you meet a hermit older than I."

So he continued traveling until he came to the second hermit, who said the same thing. Finally, he reached the oldest hermit, who told him what to do. Soon he began climbing the mountain where he encountered the giants with their eyes open. So he entered and found the door closed. He opened it and went past the lion and the scissors. Then he continued through the room until he saw the entrance to the garden in which he found the statues and the Talking Bird on top of the basin.

Meanwhile, the aunts, who saw that both their nephews were missing, were very glad. At the same time, the sister took out the ring and noticed that it had become clear once again. Yet, when the Talking Bird saw her second brother appear in the garden, it said to him, "Do you see what has happened to your brother? And your mother has been sent to the treadmill."

"Alas, my mother is in the treadmill?"

As soon as he uttered these words, he became a statue. The sister looked at her ring, and it had become black. Poor girl! There was nothing left for her to do but to get dressed like a page and set out on a journey. When she approached the first hermit, he asked, "Where are you going, my fine lad?"

"I'm going to fetch the Talking Bird."

"You're heading for trouble, my son. But keep on traveling until you'll meet a hermit older than I."

So she went to the second hermit, who told her the same thing. Finally, she came to the third hermit who told her everything she had to do.

"Keep your eyes open," he added. "If you respond when the bird talks, you will lose your life! Be on your guard, my daughter!"

Upon listening to his words, she took her leave and traveled until she reached the garden. When the bird saw her, it cried out, "Ah! You're here, too? Now you will become just like your brothers! Do you see them? One, two, and you will make three . . . Your father is at war . . . Your mother is in the treadmill . . . Your aunts are rejoicing."

But she did not reply. Instead, she let the bird sing on. When it had said all it had to say, it flew down, and the young girl ran and caught it. Then she pulled a feather from its wing, dipped it into the basin, and brushed the nostrils of her brothers with it. All at once they came to life again. Then she did the same with all the other statues, with the lions and the giants, until they all became alive once more. Afterward she departed with her brothers, while

all the noblemen, dukes, barons, and princes, who had been statues, were celebrating their freedom.

As they turned their backs on the palace, it disappeared, and the hermits vanished, for they had been the three fairies. When the brothers and their sister returned to the city, the servants came, and there was a party that evening. The following day they summoned a goldsmith and had him make a gold chain and attached it to the bird. When their aunts looked out their window, they saw the Dancing Water, the Singing Apple, and the Talking Bird in the palace opposite them.

"Well," they said, "now we're in real trouble!"

Indeed, let me tell you what happened.

The bird cried out, "Mistress!"

"What do you want?" she asked.

"Call your brothers."

"What do you want?" they asked.

"I want you to provide us with a grand coach, more elegant than the king's."

And they did this right away.

"I want you to provide twenty-four attendants . . . and cooks and servants more splendid than the king's."

And everything was done immediately.

When the aunts saw all this, they were ready to explode with rage. Just at this time the king returned from the war, and his subjects told him all the news of the kingdom, but they didn't tell him about his wife and children.

Now, one day, the king went out on his balcony and saw that there was a palace across from his that was furnished in a magnificent manner.

"Who lives there?" he asked, but no one could answer him. He looked again and saw the brothers and sister. The brothers had apples in their hands, and the sister, a star on her forehead.

"Jesus!" he cried out. "If I didn't know that my wife had given birth to three puppies, I would say that those were my children!"

On another day he stood by the window and enjoyed the Dancing Water and the Singing Apple, but the bird was silent. After the king had heard all the music, the bird said, "What does your majesty think of it?"

The king was astonished at hearing the Talking Bird and said: "What should I think? It's marvelous."

"There is something more marvelous," the bird said. "Just wait!"

Then the bird turned away from the king and cried out: "Mistress, call your brothers."

When they were all together, the bird spoke, "The king has returned. Let's invite him to dinner on Sunday. Is this all right with you?"

"Yes, yes," they all said.

So the bird turned back to the king and invited him, and he accepted.

On Sunday the bird had a grand dinner prepared. When the king came and saw the young people, he clapped his hands and said, "I don't understand all this, but they seem to be my children."

He went through the palace and was astonished at its richness. Then they went to dinner, and while they were eating, the king said, "Bird, everyone is talking, but you alone are silent."

"Ah! Your majesty, I am sick, but next Sunday, I shall be well and be able to talk. Indeed, I shall come and dine at your palace with this young lady and these gentlemen, if it pleases you."

"Yes, bird," the king replied.

The following Sunday the bird called his mistress and her brothers and told them to put on their finest clothes. When they were fully dressed, they looked like royalty. Then they departed with the bird. The king showed them around his palace and treated them with great courtesy, while the aunts felt they were about to die. When they had all seated themselves at the table, the king said, "Come, bird, you promised me you would talk. Have you nothing to say?"

Then the bird began and related all that had happened from the time that the king had listened at the door until his poor wife had been sent to the treadmill. At the very end the bird added: "These are your children, and your wife was sent to the mill and is dying."

As soon as the king heard all this, he rushed to embrace his children and then went to find his poor wife, who was reduced to skin and bones and was on the verge of death. He knelt before her and begged her pardon. Then he summoned her sisters and the midwife, and when they were in his presence, he said to the bird, "Bird, you who have told me everything may now pronounce their sentence."

"Well, if you want me to sentence them, your majesty, I say that the midwife is to be thrown head-first from the window, and your sisters-in-law are to be cast into a kettle of boiling oil."

The king had the bird's sentence carried out. The midwife was immediately thrown out of the window, and the aunts were cast into a kettle. Afterward, the king never tired of embracing his wife. Meanwhile, the bird departed, and the king and his wife and children lived together in blessed peace.

Well, they remained happy and content,  
While we can't even pay the rent.

*Told by Rosalia Varrica in Palermo.*

## 37. ROSEMARY

Once upon a time there was a king and a queen who did not have any children. One day the queen descended into the garden, saw a rose bush that had many buds, and said, "Just look at that! A mere rosebush has many children, while I who am queen have none!"

After a few days she became pregnant. It did not take long, and within nine months she gave birth to a rosemary bush. Afterward, she watered this plant with milk and kept it in a pot on the table. One of her nephews, the son of the King of Spain, happened to see the bush and asked, "Your majesty, why is this rosemary plant sitting there?"

"I gave birth to this rosemary bush," his aunt told him what had happened, "and I water it four times every day."

Meanwhile, the young man said to himself, "I want this rosemary bush!"

He prepared a beautiful pot on his ship, bought a goat to provide milk, took the rosemary bush, and disappeared. Four times a day a day he gave the plant milk. When he arrived at his city, he had the rosemary bush planted in his garden.

This King of Spain had three sisters, and he amused himself by playing a flute. One day while he was playing in the garden, he saw a maiden appear and said to her, "Where did you come from?"

"I come from the rosemary bush."

You should have seen the king! From that moment on, he didn't leave the palace. As soon as he finished his affairs as king, he went down into the garden, played the flute, and enjoyed himself by conversing with the maiden.

In the meantime war was declared against the king, and he said to the maiden, "Listen, my Rosemary, I must be off, but when I return, I'll play the flute three times, and you can come out again."

Then he called the gardener and told him to water the rosemary bush four times a day with milk, and if he found the rosemary wilted when he returned, he would cut off his head. Thereupon, he left the flute in his room, took his leave from his sisters, and departed.

His sisters had become curious about their brother's behavior and said, "What did our brother do with that flute?"

The first sister found it and played it, then the second, and finally the third. At the third time the maiden appeared.

"Ah, this explains why our brother no longer left the palace," they said, "and why he spent all his days in the garden!"

They grabbed her and beat her until she was more dead than alive.

Somehow the poor maiden managed to crawl to the rosemary plant and disappeared. When the gardener came and found that the rosemary had wilted, he said, "Poor me, what will the king do to me when he returns?! So he ran to his wife and said, "I must leave, and I want you to continue watering the rosemary bush."

After he departed, he walked through the countryside until night overtook him in the forest. Since he did not want to be eaten by ferocious beasts, he climbed a tree. At midnight the ogre Papa-drago and the ogress Mamma-draga arrived and threw themselves down against the tree, snorting in a frightful way.

"What's new?" the Mamma-draga asked.

"What's there new to be told?" responded the Papa-drago.

"You don't have anything new to tell me?"

"One thing I can tell you. The life of the king's gardener is in danger."

"Why's that?"

"Don't you know that the king returned with a rosemary bush that he took from his aunt, and that there was a maiden enchanted inside the bush? Then he took the bush into his garden and had it watered four times a day with milk. One day, when he was playing the flute, the maiden came out of the rosemary bush. All this you know, but you don't know that the king had to go off to war and placed the gardener in charge of the plant, and he left the flute in his room. However, his sisters took it and played it, causing the maiden to come out of the rosemary bush. They gave her a good beating and left her more dead than alive. So the rosemary wilted, and the gardener fled in fear of his life."

"But isn't there a remedy?"

"Of course, there's a remedy, but I don't want to tell you because there are ears everywhere in the woods, and the walls have ears."

"Come on! Who can hear us in this place?"

"All right. Listen. The blood from my veins and the flesh of the nape of your neck have to be boiled together. Then all this has to be spread like an ointment on the rosemary bush, and the maiden will emerge."

"Ah," said the gardener, "please help me, my fate!"

As soon as the ogres went to sleep, he climbed down the tree, took a large club and killed them. Then he took the blood from the ogre and the flesh from the nape from the ogress, ran back home, and spread it all over the rosemary bush. Immediately the maiden emerged, and the rosemary bush wilted. He took the maiden by the hand, led her to his house, and put her to bed where he nursed her with broth and medicine. About the time that her health was beginning to improve, the king returned from the war and ran

immediately into the garden where he played the flute. But no matter how much he played, the maiden did not appear. Then, when he went to the rosemary bush, he found it dried up.

The poor gardener had not been able to summon the courage to tell the king what had happened because Rosemary was still somewhat sick. But the king bellowed. "Either you tell me what has happened to Rosemary, or I'll have your head cut off!"

So the gardener said, "Your majesty, come into my house, and I'll show you something beautiful."

"What am I supposed to do in your house, you scoundrel! I want Rosemary!"

"But your majesty! Just come inside, and then you can do what you want with me."

When the king heard this, he went inside. As soon as he entered, he saw Rosemary in the bed with tears in her eyes.

"What happened?" he asked.

The maiden responded, "I got these wounds from your sisters who beat me, and when the poor gardener saw that I was dying, he spread a certain ointment over me, and now I'm recovering."

Just think how much the king detested his sisters! And think how grateful he was to the gardener who brought Rosemary back to life!

When she was fully recovered, the king told her that he wanted to marry her. He wrote to his uncle, the king, and told him that the rosemary plant had become a beautiful young lady and that they had set the day of the wedding, and he invited him and his wife, the queen. The ambassadors departed with the invitation, and as soon as the king received this news that he had a daughter, you can imagine his joy.

The king and queen set out on the journey to attend the wedding, and when they arrived, they were greeted with cannons—"Boom! Boom!"

"Who's arrived?"

"The king has arrived!"


When the king and queen saw their daughter, they embraced and kissed her, and the maiden became acquainted with her father and mother. Then the wedding was celebrated, and there was a grand party thrown for all of Spain.

They remained content and in peace

While we're still sitting and picking our teeth.

*Told by a woman in the house of Professor Carmelo Pardi in Palermo.*

### 38. THE MAGIC BALLS

nce upon a time there was a king who believed he was handsome. He had a mirror and used to say all the time:

“Beautiful mirror, tell me sweetly,  
Who in the world is more handsome than me?”

His wife tolerated this for one, two, three, four times, but finally she said:

“Keep quiet, my king, there’s nothing to do,  
There’s someone I know more handsome than you.”

Infuriated, he responded, “If you don’t tell me within three days who’s more handsome than I am, you’ll be killed!”

The poor queen became bewildered and retired to her rooms where she stayed the entire time. As she was trying to think of someone on the last day, she went out on the balcony. An old woman passed by and said, “Your majesty, I beg you for some alms.”

“Let me be, good woman,” the queen responded. “I’ve got my own troubles.”

“I know everything,” the old woman said, “and I also know how to make your troubles go away.”

“Then come up here!” said the queen.

The old woman mounted the stairs, and the queen asked, “What do you know?”

“Everything that the king said,” she replied.

“And so there’s some way for me to get out of this?”

“Yes, my lady.”

“I’ll give you whatever you want,” said the queen.

“I don’t want anything,” the old woman declared. “At noon you are to go have lunch with the king. Then you are to ask him a favor. He will ask: ‘What favor? To grant you your life?’ You are to respond, ‘No.’ Then he will say: ‘So, you concede?’ And you will tell him: ‘No, the son of the Emperor of France, covered with seven veils, is more handsome than you.’”

The old woman departed, and the queen did as she said. Then the king responded, “If this prince is truly better looking than I am, you can do with me as you wish.”

Three days later, the king left with his retinue to seek out the Emperor of France. When he presented himself, he said, “I would like to see your son.”

“All right,” the emperor replied, “but he is sleeping just now.”

After some time had passed, the emperor brought the king into the room where his son was sleeping. When he lifted the first veil, there was a glow. When he took off the second veil, the glow increased. Then the third and fourth veils were lifted, and when he came to the last, the flames of the son's beauty grew even more radiant until the prince appeared with his scepter in his hand and a sword at his side. Dazzled by such beauty, the king fainted and collapsed on the ground, and they had to give him smelling salts and essence to revive him.

The emperor had him carried to his rooms and kept him there for three days.

"Before this king departs," the prince said to his father, "I would like to talk to him."

So he went to the king, and they began conversing until the prince said, "Would you like to see me when you are at your home?"

"How is that possible?"

"Take these three gold balls, and when you would like to see me, throw them into a golden basin filled with three quarts of clean and pure milk, and I shall appear just as I am now."

So the king took the three gold balls and bid him farewell. When he returned home, he said to his wife, "Here I am. Do with me what you like."

And the queen responded, "May you be blessed."

The king told her what had happened and showed her the three gold balls. But the king had suffered so much from the stress of his journey that he died at the end of three days. The queen was most distressed, but after four days, she called for a faithful chambermaid and said, "Go and fetch three quarts of clean, pure milk!"

Then she prepared the basin, and after filling it with milk, she threw the three balls into the basin, and gradually the sword appeared, then the scepter, and finally the prince in person. They talked and conversed together, and then he left. The queen put the milk aside, and the next day she filled the basin with fresh milk, and the prince appeared again. She did the same thing for many days until the chambermaid became tired of this and said to herself, "There's got to be something extraordinary beneath all this!"

So what did the chambermaid do? She broke a glass bottle, ground it into powder, and hid the powder in her bosom. The next day, when the queen sent her to fetch the milk as she usually did, the chambermaid poured the powder into the milk while she was on the stairs. Then, as soon as the queen threw the three balls into the basin, she saw the sword and scepter appear covered with blood and then the prince in a bath of blood from wounds caused by the splinters of glass.

When he saw her, he said, "Ah, you've betrayed me!"

The queen begged his pardon a thousand times, but the prince's time was up, and he vanished and went back to his country. When his father saw his condition, he issued a proclamation that said he would give anything if a doctor could be found capable of healing his son. Meanwhile the city was draped in mourning, and the bells tolled for the prince.

After having seen the prince in such terrible condition, the queen could not take her mind off him. So, after she dressed herself as a shepherd, she set out for his city in France. When it turned dark the first night, she entered a forest, where she took refuge in a tree in an open space and began saying her prayers. At midnight, all the devils of hell arrived at the open space, and they sat down in a circle around their chief, who began to ask each one what they had done until he came to the last one who was the *Lame Devil* called Zoppo.

"And you, you ugly thing, who never knows anything good to report!"

"My lord," he replied. "It's true that I've worked many years without much success, but this time I've something good to report . . ."

And he told the story about the king and the queen and the prince and how he had caused the chambermaid to deceive the queen. "But now," he added, "the prince has only three days to live, and since there's no hope for him, we'll be able to cart him away."

"But tell me," the chief devil asked, "isn't it possible that someone will be able to cure this prince?"

"There's a remedy, but I won't tell it," Zoppo responded.

"And why won't you tell us?"

"Because somebody might be listening."

"What are you saying, you fool?" they all said. "Who can hear you here? If there were someone here, he'd already be dead from fright!"

Nevertheless, he continued to say no while the chief devil argued with him. Finally, they all forced him to tell them the remedy, and he said, "One day's walk from here there is a certain wood with a monastery that has glass herbs growing nearby. It's necessary to carry a couple of bags to gather the herbs. Once you have them, you've got to ground the herbs with a mortar and gather the juice into a glass. Then the juice has to be smeared on the prince from head to toe, and he'll be just as good as he was before."

Upon hearing the remedy, the queen decided that it was time now to go to this monastery where the glass herbs were to be found. Well, she walked and walked, and finally she reached the monastery, where she called out to the hermits. But they exorcised her and barred her from entering.

"Don't exorcise me," she cried out. "I've been baptized!"

So they opened the door, and she asked for some glass herbs, and they gave

them to her that very same evening. The next day she departed for the prince's city which she found draped in mourning. Dressed as a shepherd, she presented herself to a guard who would not allow her to enter. But when the emperor heard her, he ordered the guard to let her pass. So she mounted the palace stairs and asked the emperor to dismiss all the doctors and assured him that in two days she would cure the prince. The emperor, who didn't know what more could be done for his son, granted the request and ordered the servants to give the shepherd all that he demanded. So they brought him a mortar, and he crushed the herbs. Then he collected the juice and began to spread it on the prince from head to toe. Wherever he smeared the juice, the wounds were cleaned. The shepherd did this for two days until the prince was completely cured.

Then the shepherd called the emperor and returned his son to him, more healthy and more handsome ever than before. The emperor wanted to give him many treasures, but the shepherd didn't want anything and was already about to leave when the prince said to him, "Here, at least accept this ring as a souvenir."

"This is the only thing I'll take," the shepherd replied and then said farewell.

The poor queen returned to her home as soon as she could. Upon her return, she did not have the chambermaid fetch the milk as she usually did. Instead, she went and fetched it by herself, clean and pure. Then she shut herself in her room, poured the milk into the basin, and threw in the three magic balls. All of a sudden, the prince appeared, but as soon as he saw her, he wanted to kill her. However, the queen threw herself at his feet and said, "No, it wasn't me who betrayed you! I was the one who saved you." Then she showed him his ring.

So the prince calmed himself, and the queen told him about her hardships and the story of the devil Zoppo. Then they decided to get married, and the prince set out for his own country. When he arrived at his father's palace, he told him all that had happened and that he wanted to marry the queen. The emperor was very pleased, and they departed together to fetch the queen. When they arrived at the palace, they killed the chambermaid and took the queen with them. Once they returned to their realm, the wedding was celebrated.

So they enjoyed life with all its fruits

While we sit here like a bunch of dried-out roots.

*Collected by Pasquale-Salvatore Vigo in Acireale.*

### 39. THE EMPRESS ROSINA

**I**'ve heard tell that there once was a merchant who had three daughters. The youngest was the best of them, and she was called Rosina. But her sisters called her "Stable Girl," and they always treated her with disdain. When the father's fortunes fell, he retired to the country with his daughters. Some time thereafter he received news that one of his sailing ships had been saved and the merchandise recovered, and he got ready to depart for the city.

"Father, when you return, bring me a beautiful dress!" his oldest daughter said.

"Me, too," said the second.

But the third remarked, "Father, I only want a rose."

Soon the father set out on this way, but when he received the money for his goods, there were so many debts to pay that he didn't have a cent left to his name. So he remained in debt. When he began his journey home, he saw a rose bush on the road and said to himself, "Though I can't bring the dresses to my two eldest daughters, I'll bring a rose to Rosina." So he picked one, but when he picked it, he found himself face to face with a monster.

"How dare you pick this rose?"

The merchant told him what had happened and that his daughter Rosina asked him to bring back a rose.

"Listen," said the monster, "I'll give you a full week to bring me your daughter Rosina, and she will make you rich."

Then he took the merchant into the palace, and there was a beautiful well-furnished table, and after they ate, there was a beautiful well-made bed, and the merchant went to sleep. Upon waking the next day the merchant found a nice sum of money on the table. Then he left the palace, got on his horse, and departed. When he arrived at his home, he gave the rose to Rosina.

"And nothing for us?" the two elder sisters asked.

"Nothing, my daughters, because we don't have any more money!"

"Well, just look! You thought about Stable Girl, but you didn't think about us at all!"

Then the father had them look at the money and told them the story about the monster.

"Do you want to go to the monster's palace, Rosina?"

"Yes, you take her there!" the two sisters responded.

"Let's go, father!" Rosina was content, and they departed.

When they arrived, they were taken care of by servants who took the horses to the stable. At the palace they found the table covered with

sumptuous dishes, and they ate and went to bed. The father had one bed, and the daughter another. The father stayed three days, and at the end of this time, he took his leave from his daughter and departed with bags filled with gold coins. The monster was at the head of the stairs and said to him: "Thank you for bringing me your daughter. Don't worry about how she'll be treated."

Rosina was glad to be in the palace. She opened some books and read "The Empress Rosina." She opened the wardrobe closet: "The Empress Rosina." She took a beautiful dress: "The Empress Rosina." Always "The Empress Rosina!" In the evening a small door opened, and the monster appeared.

"Beautiful Rosina," he asked, "do you need anything?"

"Nothing," she responded with grace. "I only want to thank you."

Each evening the monster showed up, and they conversed a little.

One time, he said, "You don't know this, Rosina, but your eldest sister is about to get married. Would you like to attend the wedding?"

"Yes, I'd like to go there."

"I'll send you there, but only on the condition that, after you see her, you'll return here."

The next day the chambermaids and servants dressed and groomed her. Then she departed in a grand carriage accompanied by ladies of the court. When the sisters saw this lady arrive with such an entourage, they were amazed. Rosina did not reveal who she was. She attended the wedding, and at the end she got back into the carriage and returned to the monster's palace. Meanwhile, her sisters remained curious and wanted to find out who the unknown lady was.

Upon her return, the monster appeared in the evening and asked, "Did you enjoy yourself, Rosina?"

"Very much!"

And after some days: "Rosina, do you know that your middle sister is going to marry. Would you like to go there?"

"Yes, if you send me."

The monster had another dress made for her, more beautiful than the first one. After the chambermaids dressed her, she got into a carriage and arrived at her father's home. Everyone was amazed to see such a fine lady, and they showered her with honors, bowing and paying respects. When the party finished, she returned home.

That night the monster appeared and asked her, "Did you enjoy yourself, Rosina?"

"Very much."

But one day the monster spoke frankly to her: "Rosina, do you want to marry me?"

"Listen, I want you for a friend, not for a husband . . ."

But then she thought to herself, "How can you be this way? He helped my family out of a miserable situation, gives me everything I need, and loves me very much. And I spoke to him that way? Why shouldn't I take him for my husband?" Then she looked at him and saw that he was ugly.

One evening the monster sighed.

"Why are you sighing?"

"Why should I tell you? You would feel as if you had been stabbed."

"No, if that's the reason, I want to know."

The monster turned to her and said, "Your father is sick. Would you like to go and see him?"

"If you want to send me there."

"Yes, I'm going to send you there. Take this ring. If you don't return at the end of nine days, I'll start to die. When you look at the ring, you'll see that the ring will have become black. If you don't return, I shall die."

And he picked up the ring with the tip of a cane and gave it to her, and she placed it on her finger.

The next morning she found the carriage ready and departed. As soon as she arrived at home, she found her father more dead than alive. Poor girl, she could not restrain herself from crying out, "Oh, my father!"

When her sisters heard this, they exclaimed, "Ah, you're our sister!" and they embraced her.

After two days her father recovered, but her sisters didn't want her to leave anymore. Yet, Rosina insisted that she had to depart while they continued to argue against her. That night—she had been absent from the palace for nine days—after she went to bed, she looked at the ring and saw that it was as black as spades. She jumped out of bed, dressed herself, and left. The carriage was ready, and she departed. After she arrived at the palace, she found the monster entangled in the branches of the rose bush. Rosina turned pale. With the patience of a saint, she began pulling out the thorns in his back so that he wouldn't suffer any more. Then she took a certain ointment and spread it on his body. Afterward she began to weep like Maria Our Lady in Sorrow. She did the same thing the next day, and for the four days that followed.

On the fourth day the monster reappeared at her door.

"You see, Rosina, because of you I almost died. Now, do you want me for your husband?"

And she replied without catching a breath and said, "No, my lord."

One evening the monster reappeared and said the same thing: "Rosina, do you want me for your husband?"

"No. I want you for a friend, not for a husband."

He closed the door and went away. But right after the door reopened, and a handsome young man appeared and said, "Rosina, do you want me for a husband?"

"No, between you and him, who has done so much for me, I would prefer to take the monster who has been so good to me and not you!"

"But I'm a handsome man, and he's ugly . . ."

"No. I won't pick you. Between you and him, I would pick him."

"No? Well then, good evening!" he closed the door and went away.

Then the monster reappeared.

"Let me be," Rosina said. "Just a moment ago, a handsome young man came and asked: 'Would you like to take me for your husband?' And I responded, 'Get out of here. Between you and the monster I would prefer to take the monster.' "

"Are you telling the truth, Rosina? How did he look? Handsome?"

"Yes, my lord. Handsome!"

"Did he look like me?"

"No. He was a handsome young man. You're ugly."

"If you were to see him again, would you recognize him?"

"Yes, my lord, I would recognize him. But I wouldn't pick him."

"So then, you would take me?"

"Now we are courting! So, I would take you!"

"Truly? You'll take me for your husband?"

"Yes, truly, I'll take you for my husband!"

No sooner did she utter these words than he began to shed the skin of the monster and immediately became a handsome young man, more handsome than the man who had appeared before. All at once a great number of servants, lords, cavaliers, and ladies of the court gathered there. The palace was completely illuminated, for it was the palace of the emperor, and the monster was the emperor in person. The royal chapel was opened, and they were married. Then the emperor and empress began their regime and thus

they remained happy and in peace  
while we're still here picking our teeth.

*Told by a woman in the home of Pardi in Palermo.*

## 40. THE LITTLE MOUSE WITH THE STINKY TAIL

They say that once upon a time there was a king, who had a beautiful daughter, more beautiful than words can say. She received marriage proposals from many monarchs and emperors, but her father was unwilling to give her to anyone because every night he heard a voice that told him:

“Do not allow your daughter to marry!”

Each and every day this maiden looked at herself in the mirror and said, “How can it be that I am so very beautiful and yet cannot marry?”—and she continued to be bothered by this.

One day, when they all were dining, the princess said to her father:

“My father, how is it that I am so very beautiful and yet cannot marry? Let me speak my mind clearly: I *want* to get married!”

“My daughter, do you think I can simply *order* people to marry you?”

“Well, father, let me say this: I’ll give you two days to find me a husband. If you can’t do it within two days, I’ll kill myself.”

“Since it’s come to this,” the king said, “listen to what you must do. Dress yourself today in your finest outfit and sit at the window. The first person who passes by and looks at you will be the one you marry.”

The princess did exactly what he said. And while she was seated at the window, along came a little mouse with a tail that was very long and very stinky. As he passed by, he looked at her. When the girl saw this, she ran inside the house screaming.

“Father, do you know what happened? Just now a mouse passed by and looked at me. Is this the one I must marry?”

“Yes, my daughter, isn’t that what I told you? The first one who passes by is the one you must marry.”

Well, back and forth they went, she saying “no” and he saying “yes,” until it was dawn. Then the king wrote to all the princes and people of nobility inviting them to a great wedding feast to celebrate his daughter’s marriage. Soon the guests arrived and took seats at the table. At the height of the festivities they heard a tapping at the door, and who do you think it was?

The mouse with the stinky tail.

A servant went to open the door, and when he saw a mouse, he said, “What do *you* want here?”

“Go and tell the king that the mouse has come to marry his daughter.”

The servant went to tell the king, laughing scornfully, but the king ordered

him to admit the creature. Once inside, the mouse ran and took a seat right next to the princess.

Poor girl! When she saw him next to her, she shrank away from him in disgust, but the little mouse just pressed himself closer and closer to her, as if he didn't have a seat of his own. The king explained to his guests why the mouse was there, and they all laughed and said, "You're right! That's right! The little mouse should marry the princess!"

The next day there was another great banquet, and at the height of things, *presto!* The mouse appeared again and took his seat next to the princess. At this point the guests all began laughing up their sleeves. When the little mouse saw this, he went up to the king and gave him a warning: everyone at the table had better stop their laughing, otherwise there was going to be trouble.

The little mouse was so short that he couldn't reach the table from his chair. So, in order to eat, he had to get up onto the middle of the table, and no one dared to say anything. But at this banquet there was one rather fastidious lady. When the first course came, the mouse began to run around to all the plates, and this lady suffered in silence. The same thing happened with the second course. When it happened with the third course, she lost control and attacked the mouse with all kinds of abuse. The mouse was furious at being treated so harshly and began leaping at the faces of all the guests. At the height of this turmoil, the table vanished, along with the guests and the palace and everything else, and they all found themselves scattered here and there in the valley.

Now let's leave them and return to the princess. Finding herself alone in the valley, she began to cry, saying over and over,

"Oh my little mouse, at first I didn't want you, but now I long for you!"

Then she set out walking, trusting to God and to fortune, and eventually she met a hermit, who asked her,

"What are you doing here, my fine young lady, alone amongst all these animals? You should be careful, lest you meet up with Mamma-draga the ogress or with a lion, and then poor you!"

"That's not what I'm worried about. What I need is to find my little mouse. At first I didn't want him, but now I long for him. Oh my dear little mouse, where did you go?"

"Do you want my advice?" the hermit asked. "Turn around and go back, otherwise your life is in danger."

"What choice do I have? Whether I live or die, I have to find the little mouse."

"Oh my child, in order to find him you'll have to make a long journey. Here's what to do. Go further, and you'll find another hermit, older than me. He will be able to tell you where to search."

So she said goodbye to him and went forward, singing the same song over and over:

“Oh my little mouse, where in the world can you be?”

As she walked along, she met an old man with a white beard, so long that it reached his feet. She was afraid, but he said, “Don’t be afraid, my child. I am baptized flesh, the same as you. Tell me, where are you going?”

“I am looking for the little mouse with the stinky tail.”

“Then here’s what you must do. Dig a hole in the ground as big as yourself, go down the hole, and then it’s up to you to see what happens.”

The poor girl had no way of digging such a hole. Then she thought of taking out her hairpin and using that, and so she began to dig. Eventually she had dug a very large hole, and she disappeared down into it. She found a large underground chamber and began to walk along in the dark.

“Here’s to luck and good fortune!” she said to herself.

She had to pass through so many spider-webs that they clung to her pretty face and made it dark as smoke. For every cobweb she pulled from her face, a hundred others clung there. After she had walked for an entire day, she heard the rustling sound of water. Drawing closer, she saw a pond full of water. She wanted to cross it, but the pond was too deep. So she began to cry and to repeat,

“Oh my little mouse, how I long for you!

Oh my little mouse, where in the world can you be?”

There was no way she could go forward, and there was no turning back because the hole had closed up again. All she could do was to cry.

At this moment, a shower of water began pouring down on her from above. “What can I do now?” she asked. “If I haven’t died by this time, surely I’m going to die now.”

As she said this, she heard a voice that said, “Why all this whimpering? You’re hurting my ears! Just throw yourself into this pond, and see what happens.”

The girl had no choice but to throw herself into the water. All at once she found herself inside a huge palace, a marvel to behold. She entered the first room, and it was all made of glass. She entered the second room, and it was all velvet. She entered the third, and it was all gold and sequins with great couches and lamps, such as she had never seen before. She walked so far that she couldn’t find the spot where she had entered, and now she was lost—that’s how huge the palace was. Feeling completely lost, she cried out,

“Oh my little mouse, what should I do?”

And a voice answered, "Just make a command."

"My command," she said, "is for something to eat."

Suddenly a beautiful table appeared before her, and it was completely set with a big plate of pasta and so many other dishes that even someone with no appetite would have wanted to eat. The poor girl began eating with gusto. But the strange thing was, she didn't see anybody, and the dishes came and went of their own accord with no one carrying them.

Next she found herself inside a carriage in the middle of a garden. She saw many lovely things there, but couldn't figure out where they were coming from. When evening came, she found a beautiful bed and lay down in it.

Midnight came, and she heard a rustling noise. When she looked, she saw a little mouse approaching her bed. The poor girl was terrified and trembling like a leaf because she didn't know who he was. She prayed to God for help, reciting a string of Our Fathers and Hail Marys.

Morning came, and she didn't see a soul. "What strange things happened last night!" she said to herself, as she went on with her day. Evening came, she went to bed, and again she heard the rustling noise. "Who could it possibly be?" She had no way of knowing. The third night came, and precisely at midnight the mouse appeared. "*Pi-ti-pi-ti, pi-ti-pi-ti*," the mouse was dancing.

"Oh blessed Mary, all this commotion again?" she said. "Tell me, who in the world are you to be making such a racket?"

"Who am I? Just light the lamp and you'll see who I am."

She got down from her bed and lit the lamp, and what did she see? A handsome young man!

"I was the little mouse with the stinky tail because of a wicked spell that turned me into a mouse. The only way I could be set free from the spell was if a maiden would fall in love with me and suffer all the terrible things you have suffered. Once you came all the way here without feeling disgusted by me, I was able to turn back into a man.

Well, you can imagine the joy that girl felt! The two of them made their way out of the underground palace, and at once were engaged and married.

And so they lived on, in contentment and peace,

While we just sit here, cleaning our teeth.

*Told by a young girl named Maria Giuliano in Palermo.*

## 41. THE LITTLE LAMB

Once upon a time there was a poor laborer whose wife had died and left him with a daughter to raise. Since he did not like being alone, he decided to re-marry and found a second wife. Well, you know how hard it is for stepmothers to tolerate stepdaughters. This one was no exception, and she enjoyed making the poor girl's life miserable. Among other things, every morning she would give the girl the washing to do and not allow her to eat anything until she gave it back all finished.

One day the father was out in the countryside and found a little lamb. He was very happy to take it home as a present for his daughter. How it would give her great pleasure, he thought, for he loved her so very much! Well, when the lamb saw how badly the girl was being treated, it spoke to her and said:

"Don't let yourself be upset by this. Just put all the washing between my horns, and I'll do it for you."

So the girl did this, and in the wink of an eye the washing was all done.

When the stepmother saw how quickly the maiden got all the work done, she became enraged. So the next time she watched very carefully and discovered the girl's secret. That same evening, when her husband came home, her first thought was to say to him:

"Do you know what I've been thinking? Now that we're in the last days of Carnival, it would be a good time to have that little lamb slaughtered."

The husband wasn't able to answer either yes or no, but you can imagine how upset the girl was when she heard this. She cried and cried, and then she went to the lamb to tell it the news.

"Don't let yourself be upset by this," the lamb answered. "It's all right if they slaughter me. Just make sure that you don't eat one morsel of my flesh, and afterwards, collect all my bones and bury them under the floor."

A few days later they slaughtered the lamb, and the maiden did everything exactly as the lamb had instructed her to do. Not much time passed when, from the very place where she had buried the bones, out came twelve beautiful young maidens.

"You must go," they said, "to where the king is having a great party."

So, they dressed her all in gold and took her there. When the king saw this maiden, he was so taken with her that he couldn't join in any of the music and dancing the entire evening. When she left, he told his servants to follow her and find out where she lived. But the minute she saw them following her, she loosened her hair and scattered all her pearls in front of them, so that the servants could think only of picking up the pearls, allowing the girl to escape.

The king grew even more extreme, and the next evening at the party he said to his servants:

“Either you’re going to find out where she lives, or I’ll have your heads chopped off!”

This time, just as she was leaving, she threw them her shoe as she ran off. The servants picked it up and carried it to the king, who then issued a proclamation saying:


*“I will take as my wife the woman whose foot fits this shoe.”*

Once the women of the realm heard this proclamation, they all came running to the palace, but the shoe would not fit any of their feet. Finally, the stepmother, who was always thinking of new ways to humiliate her stepdaughter, insisted that the maiden try it on. So you can imagine her astonishment when that shoe slipped onto the girl’s foot as naturally as if it had been made for her!

Well, the royal chapel was made ready, and there was great happiness all around. As you can imagine, the couple remained happy and content, but—bad luck for us—nothing good was sent our way.

*Collected by Di Martino in Noto. The storyteller’s name is not known.*

## 42. DATE, OH BEAUTIFUL DATE

nce upon a time there was a merchant who had three grown-up daughters: the eldest was called Rosa, the middle daughter, Giovanna, and the youngest, Ninetta, who was also the most beautiful of them all.

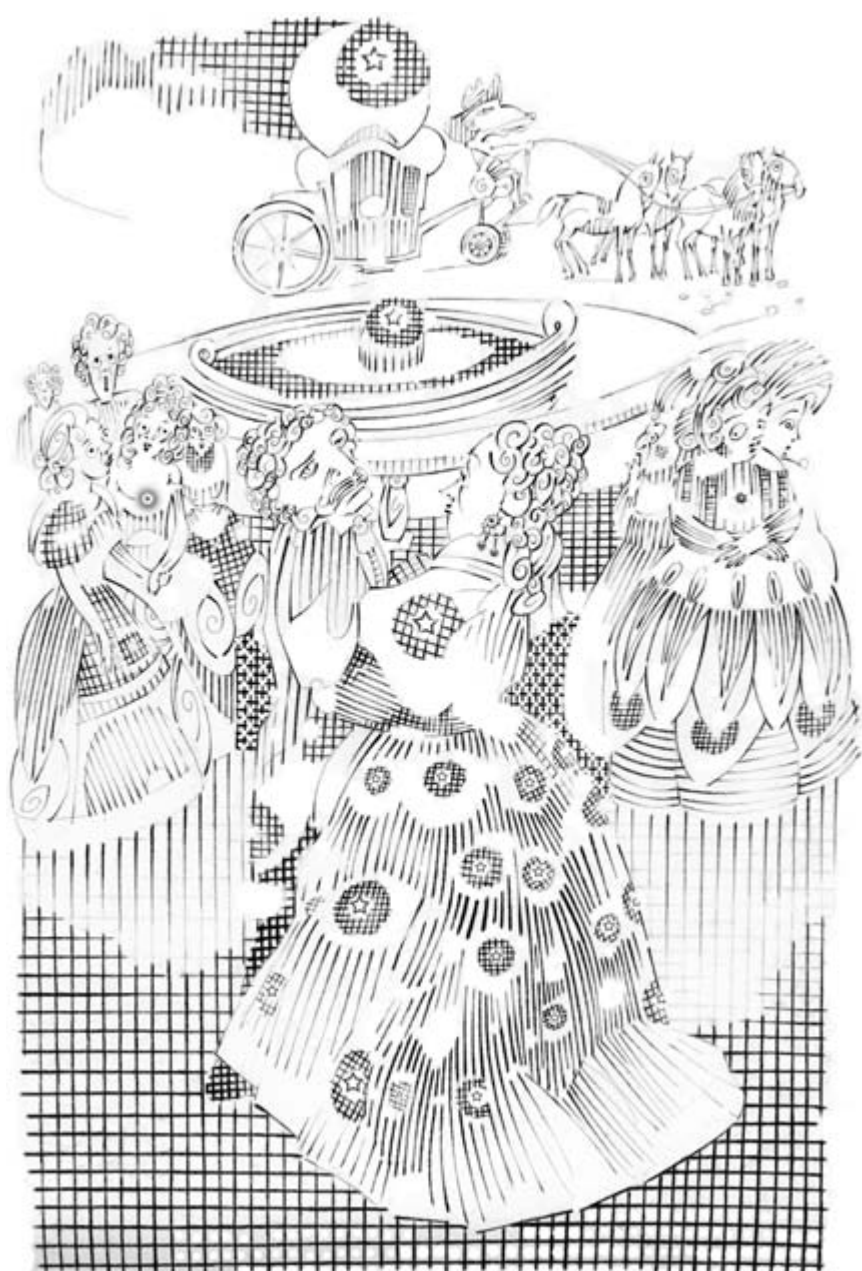
One day this merchant went and purchased a great deal of goods, but when he returned home, he appeared to be very disturbed.

“What’s wrong, father?” his daughters asked.

“Nothing, my daughters, I purchased some excellent merchandise, but I can’t do anything with the goods because I can’t leave you by yourselves.”

“Why are you getting so upset, my lord?” the eldest daughter asked. “Just leave enough provisions here for the time you are gone. Then have the doors sealed, and if it’s God’s will, we shall see you again.”

So this is what the father did. He stored a great quantity of provisions of food and ordered one of his servants to appear on the street below their window every morning and to call the eldest daughter and run errands for whatever his daughters wanted. Before he took his leave, he said, “Rosa, what do you want me to bring you?”



"Three dresses with different colors," she said.

"And you Giovannina?"

"Whatever your lordship wants to bring me."

"And you Ninetta?"

"I want a beautiful branch of dates in a silver vase. And if you forget them, may your ship be prevented from moving forward or backward."

"Oh, you shameful creature!" her sisters said. "What kind of bad spell are you casting on our father?"

"It's nothing," the father responded. "Don't take her seriously. She's still young, and we need to indulge her."

The father took his leave and journeyed to the country of his destination where he carried out his business and then bought three beautiful dresses for Rosa and three for Giovannina. But what did he forget? Indeed, the branch of dates for Ninetta. Later, after he boarded a ship, a terrible storm broke out in the middle of the sea—lightning, flashes, thunderbolts, rain, and huge waves—and the ship was unable to move forward or backward.

The captain became desperate and said, "Where did this bad weather come from?"

Then the merchant remembered his daughter's spell and replied, "Captain, I forgot to buy something. My advice is that we turn around and see what happens."

And, it was a miracle! As soon as they turned around, the weather changed, and they sailed with a fair wind. The merchant went ashore, bought a branch with dates, put it into a silver vase, and went back on board the ship. The sailors unfurled the sails, and after three days they reached their country in favorable weather.

After he arrived, the merchant had the doors unsealed, opened the windows, and gave the gifts to all his daughters, the dresses to Rosa and Giovannina and the branch with dates in a silver vase to Ninetta.

Ah, excuse me. I almost forgot the best part of my tale. While the merchant was on his journey, the eldest sister was sewing by the well. Indeed, their father had made this well for them so they would not lack any water. Well, one time she dropped her thimble into this well, and Ninetta said to her sisters, "Don't worry. Lower me into the well, and I'll get the thimble."

"Are you joking?" the eldest sister said.

"No, I want to go down and fetch it."

They said, no. She said, yes. Back and forth they went. Finally, they had to lower her down into the well. As soon as she touched the water, she grabbed the thimble. But when she pulled out her hand from the water, she noticed some light that was coming from a hole. She removed some stones and saw a

marvelous garden, really a delightful garden, for there were all kinds of flowers, trees, and fruit. At once, she slipped inside and began gathering the most beautiful flowers, fruit, and other fine things. After she had an apron full, she returned to the well without making a sound, replaced the stones, and cried out, "Pull me up!" And she reappeared fresh as a rose.

When her sisters saw the apron full of fine things, they said, "Where did you get these beautiful things?"

"What does it matter to you? Tomorrow, you'll lower me back down, and I'll get the rest."

Now, the garden belonged to the son of the King of Portugal, and when he discovered that someone had damaged his garden, he began scolding the poor gardener, who told him that he didn't know anything about what had happened. So the prince ordered him to pay more attention in the future, otherwise he would be in trouble.

The next day Ninetta prepared to descend the well again in order to explore the garden.

"Sisters, lower me down!"

"Are you crazy or drunk?"

"I'm neither crazy nor drunk. Lower me down!"

They told her, no, and she told them yes. Back and forth they went. Finally, they had to lower her down. Again she removed some stones and entered the garden. After she gathered an apron full of flowers and fruit, she had her sisters pull her up.

The prince, who had been watching from a window, saw her in the middle of the garden as she was slinking off. He ran down from the palace, but he couldn't find anyone. So he called the gardener.

"Where did that young woman come from?"

"What young woman, your majesty?"

"The one who was gathering flowers and fruit in my garden."

"I didn't see a thing, your majesty!" and he began to swear on his life that he hadn't seen a single thing. The prince realized he was innocent and retired to his rooms. However, the next day he personally kept watch and muttered to himself, "If you return, you won't escape."

On the third day Ninetta insisted again and told her sisters to lower her into the well. She had liked the adventure of the previous day. They kept saying, no, and she kept saying, yes, until they had to lower her down. She removed some stones, slipped into the garden, and gathered some wonderful things, better than the other day, until she had an apron full without realizing that the prince was laying in wait for her. When she heard a sound, she turned and saw that the prince was heading her way and about to grab her.

But in one leap she made it back through the hole, closed it with a stone, and got away.

After this encounter the poor prince couldn't find any peace of mind, and he became grief-stricken because the maiden seemed to him to be a real fairy. None of the doctors in the kingdom were able to cure him, and once the king realized that his son was losing his senses, he called all the wise men and philosophers of his kingdom together to discuss the prince's illness. First this one spoke, then another, until an old sage with a long white beard said, "Your majesty, try to find out whether your son likes some young maiden, and then we might approach this differently."

The king called his son to him and questioned him. In response his son told him the entire story and concluded by saying that he'd never be cured if he couldn't find this maiden. Consequently, the sage said, "Your majesty, I advise you to hold a festive ball for three consecutive days at your palace and issue a proclamation that all the mothers and fathers from all social classes must bring their daughters under pain of death."

The king agreed and issued the proclamation.

Now let us return to the merchant's daughters. When they had the dresses that their father had brought to them, they began to sew things on them for the first night of the ball. On the other hand, Ninetta retired to her room with her vase and dismissed the festive ball as something trivial. Her father and sisters could barely put up with her. Finally, they were convinced that she was sort of crazy and let her do what she wanted.

At the time that the proclamation had been issued by the king, the father had told his daughters. "Girls, the king is going to hold three days of festivities at his palace, and he wants every father and mother to bring their daughters. Whoever keeps a daughter away will be condemned to death."

"How wonderful!" cried Rosa and Giovannina, but Ninetta shrugged her shoulders and said, "You three go. As for me, I don't want to go."

"No, my daughter," her father said. "I'll be punished by death if you don't go, and you don't joke with death!"

"It doesn't matter to me. Besides, who knows that you have three daughters? Pretend that you only have two."

"You must go."

"No, I'm not going."

They argued back and forth until Ninetta won and remained at home with her vase of dates that were her delight.

However, as soon as her father and sisters had departed, she turned to the vase and said:

“Date, oh beautiful date,  
Come out and dress your Nina  
Make her more glamorous than ever before.”<sup>63</sup>

Well, what do you think came out of the vase? Suddenly, many fairies appeared carrying dresses and jewels without equal. They washed her, combed her hair, and dressed her—and within moments she was completely covered with a necklace, diamonds, and precious stones. After she looked like gold, she got into a carriage and arrived at the royal palace. When she entered everyone looked at her in astonishment. The prince recognized her and told this to the king. Then he approached her, took her by the arm, and asked, “My lady, how are you?”

“Like the winter.”

“What do you call yourself?”

“With a name.”

“Where do you live?”

“In a house with a door.”

“In what street?”

“In the street with a cloud of dust.”

“How strange you are! You will be the death of me.”

“May you croak!”

They danced together the entire night. The prince got tired, but she remained lively because she was enchanted. Finally she sat down near her sisters. When the party was over, the king secretly ordered his servants to follow her to find out where she lived. She left the palace and got into the carriage. But as soon as she became aware that the servants were following her, she shook her golden braids and let pearls and precious stones fall onto the road. When the servants saw this, they threw themselves upon them like chickens pecking grain. And good bye lady! She ordered the horses to be spurred on, and she was back at her home in a flash. As soon as she arrived she said:

“Oh date, beautiful date  
Come and undress Nina.  
Make her as she was before this evening.”<sup>64</sup>

63 Gràttula-beddàttula  
Acchiana susu e vesti a Nina,  
E falla cchiù galanti ch'un era assira.

64 Gràttula-beddàttula,  
Spogghia a Nina,  
E falla com'era assira.

Within that same moment she found herself in the clothes that she wore around the house.

Now let us turn to her sisters who soon arrived home.

"Ninetta, Ninetta, what a beautiful ball! There was a lady there who looked just like you! If we hadn't known that you were here, we would have said that it was you!"

"What are you saying?" Ninetta said. "I stayed here with my vase."

"But tomorrow evening, you should come, you know!"

Let us now turn to the king who was waiting for his servants. When they came back to the palace, they threw themselves at his feet and told him what had happened. Then the king said, "Worthless people! Won over by money! If you do the same thing tomorrow, you'll be in trouble!"

The next evening the sisters insisted that Ninetta go with them, but she didn't want to hear anything about this. Finally, her father ended the discussion by saying, "Don't you see that she's lost her mind over this vase? Who knows but I'll get into some trouble because of it . . . No matter, let's go!" And they left.

As soon as they departed, Ninetta approached the vase:

"Date, oh beautiful date,  
Come out and dress your Nina  
Make her more glamorous than ever before."

Immediately many fairies emerged from the vase. They combed her hair and dressed her in garments more splendid than before and covered her with jewels. After she was completely dressed, she got into a carriage and went to the royal palace. When she appeared, everyone was astounded, especially her sisters and her father. The prince approached her and was very content.

"My lady, how are you?"

"Like the winter."

"What do you call yourself?"

"With a name."

"Where do you live?"

"In a house with a door."

"In what street?"

"In the street with a cloud of dust."

"How strange you are! You will be the death of me."

"May you croak!"

But he paid no attention to what she said and invited her to dance. And they danced the entire evening. Afterward, she went and sat down next to her sisters.

“Madonna!” one of them said. “She looks exactly like Ninetta.”

When the ball was over, Ninetta was among the first to leave. As the king accompanied her to the door, he made a signal to the servants. But Ninetta noticed this, and after she got into the carriage, she saw them approaching. So she took out a number of sacks with gold coins that she had in the carriage and threw them in the face of the servants, who broke each other’s noses and hit one another in the eyes to get at the gold. So, the servants could not follow the carriage and had to crawl back to the palace like whipped dogs.

When the king saw them, he took pity on them and said, “It doesn’t matter! Tomorrow is the last evening, and in one way or another I’ll get to the bottom of this.”

Let us turn now to Ninetta who just arrived at her home and said to the vase:

“Oh date, beautiful date  
Come and undress Nina  
And make her as she was before this evening.”

Within seconds her clothes were changed, and she was wearing the dress she usually wore around the house. When her sisters arrived, they said, “Ninetta, Ninetta, what a beautiful ball! The lady who looked exactly like you returned. She was your spitting image—the eyes, the hair, the mouth, everything, even the way she talked. She was wearing a dress that we’ve never seen before. And she had jewels and precious stones that sparkled like a mirror!”

“Why are you telling me?” responded Ninetta. “I’ve had fun with my vase, and I don’t care about attending either balls or parties.”

“All right, but tomorrow you should go!”

“Really! As if it’s the only thing I can think about!”

After she ate, she went to bed.

The next evening Rosa and Giovannina wore the best dresses that their father had brought them, and they went to the party.

Ninetta refused to attend. But as soon as they left, she ran to the vase.

“Date, oh beautiful date,  
Come out and dress your Nina  
Make her more glamorous than ever before.”

Immediately numerous fairies appeared. They combed her hair, washed her, and dressed her. Afterward they put her into the carriage. At the palace she was so radiant, the people were dazzled, and she was wearing a dress and jewels that nobody had ever seen in their lives.

The prince was waiting for her, and as soon as she saw her, he asked, "My lady, how are you?"

"Like the winter."

"What do you call yourself?"

And they had the same conversation as they had before.

They danced and danced, for it was the last night. Finally, she sat down near her father and her sisters, who continued to speak among themselves.

"She is the exact image of Ninetta," they kept saying.

The king and his son also kept looking at her, and at a certain point the king took her by the arm with the excuse that he wanted to bring her into another room to give her something. When they were alone, Ninetta wanted to take her leave so she could return home, but the king was resolved to finish everything then and there and said, "For two nights you've led me in circles, but you won't succeed on the third night!"

"What's the meaning of this, your majesty?"

"The meaning is that I know who you are. You are the beautiful young lady who has driven my son crazy. You must become his wife!"

"For a favor, your majesty."

"What favor do you want?"

"I'm not free. I'm obliged to my father and two sisters."<sup>65</sup>

"You have nothing to fear," the king said, and he immediately summoned her father.

The summons of a king is not always a good sign, so they say. The father broke out into a cold sweat because he had committed a few illegal acts and didn't have a clear conscience. But the king told him how things stood and that he would pardon anything he had done if he allowed Ninetta to become the prince's wife.

Indeed, the next day the royal chapel was opened, and the prince and Ninetta were wed.

Well, they remained content and in peace

While we still sit here and pick our teeth.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

<sup>65</sup> The youngest sister in a family was generally not allowed to marry before her elder sisters had found husbands.

43. PILUSEDDA<sup>66</sup>

Once upon a time there was a king and queen, and they had a daughter who was extremely beautiful. When the girl reached fifteen years of age, her mother fell seriously ill, and realizing that her end was near, she called her husband and said to him, "Husband, my life is done, but you are still young and can marry again. Therefore, I am leaving you this ring. Whoever tries it on and finds that the ring fits, she will be the one you should take as your bride."

Soon the wife died, and after some time the husband decided to re-marry. There were many women available, and he offered marriage to the one whose finger fit the ring. But it turned out that the ring was too loose on some and too tight on others. "It's not fated to be," he said. "Let's forget it for now." And he kept the ring.

One day his daughter was cleaning the house, and she found the ring in the drawer of a cupboard. She tried it on and then found she couldn't get it off. "What will I do about my father?" she said to herself. And so what did she do? She took a piece of black cloth and wrapped her finger with it. When her father saw her finger, he asked, "My daughter, what's wrong?"

"Nothing, father, I just scraped my finger."

But after a few days had passed, her father insisted on seeing the finger, and after he unwrapped it and saw the ring, he exclaimed, "Ah, it's you who must be my wife!"

But inside the girl kept saying to herself, "I can't marry my father! I'd rather be dead!"

Not knowing what to do, she went to a wise man and told him her story.

"Here's how to solve your problem," he said. "Tell your father that you want a wedding dress, a special dress the color of the sky, embroidered in gold and precious stones with the sun and the moon and all the planets."

When the girl went to her father and asked for such a dress, he replied, "Where in the world can I find such a dress?"

He pondered this for a while and then went out into the fields and called upon his cousin, who was a demon, and told him the whole story. His cousin replied, "If I find you such a dress, what will you give me for it?"

"I'll give you my soul."

66 The name Pilusedda may be translated as "little shaggy one."

"Just wait here." And in a half hour he was back with this marvelous dress and gave it to the man.

The girl told the wise man what had happened, and he had another idea. "Ask him for a dress of sea-green, decorated with all the houses that are in the countryside."

So she went to her father and said, "Father, that was the wedding dress, but now I need another one for the civil ceremony at the city hall."

So the king went again to his cousin, who brought him a second dress in less time than it takes to tell. When the girl had the second dress, she asked for a week's delay. At the end of a week, she went to the wise man, who told her, "Now ask him for a dress for the first day that you are a married woman. And this must be a rose-colored dress, ornamented with four rows of bangles and tiny golden bells."

She did this, and her father as usual turned to his cousin. When the dress was ready, the father said, "Now, my daughter, we have no more time to lose. A week from now we shall be married."

The poor girl was utterly distraught and went to the wise man.

"There's no way out for you now," he said. "Take this walnut, this chestnut, and this hazelnut, and make use of them when you need them. Right now what you must do is find yourself a horse's hide, and have everything removed except the outer skin. Have this skin cleaned and salted, and put it on like a garment so you can pass for a horse."

The maiden did all this. Then she gathered together her clothes, and all the money, rings, and jewels in the house. When the evening came before she was to be married, she told her father that she wanted to take a bath. (This was the ancient custom, to bathe before a wedding ceremony.) And then what did that clever maiden do? To give the impression she was bathing, she put a dove inside a basin full of water, and outside she had a second dove tied by its feet to the first dove. Whenever the dove on the outside moved, it pulled the one inside the basin, and so they kept fluttering around and making splashing noises like a person washing herself. Meanwhile, the maiden went into the bathroom, slipped on her horse-skin, and escaped.

Her father waited for some time, but she didn't come out of the bath. Finally he opened the door and found that no one was there. "I've been tricked and betrayed!" he shouted, and batted his head against the wall so hard that he dropped dead on the spot. Down came the Evil One and took him away.

Now let's return to the maiden. She had already walked a great distance, and where do you think she found herself? In a preserve where there were all

kinds of animals. And who do you think was the owner of this preserve? The son of a king.

The next morning the gamekeeper saw a strange horse, walking with its front legs in the air, and his first impulse was to shoot it. But luckily the king's son came along, forbade him to shoot it, and went up close to the creature and caressed it. For her part, she rubbed against him affectionately, and this pleased him so much that he had her brought to the palace. At the foot of the stairs there was a room where she was enclosed, and the prince ordered food brought to her. Curious as to what kind of creature she was, he asked, "What sort of animal are you?"

"I am Pilusedda," she replied.

They soon became good friends, and the prince had no greater delight than to be with Pilusedda. However, this was very troubling to the prince's mother, who couldn't stand to see this friendship developing.

One day Pilusedda said to the prince, "O prince, please give me a bit of dough. I'd like to make a loaf of bread."

The prince had it brought at once. When Pilusedda was alone, she made a loaf and put her father's watch inside it. When the prince returned, she asked him to have the loaf baked, and it was baked together with the royal bread. The royal bread ended up scorched, while Pilusedda's loaf came out looking like a masterpiece. And what did the bakers do? They sent the good bread to the prince, and nothing to Pilusedda.

When the prince broke open the bread and saw the watch, he was astonished. The following day Pilusedda again asked the prince for dough, made another loaf, and this time she put in her father's tie-pin. The prince sent it to the oven where the royal bread was also being baked, and again the royal bread came out scorched while her loaf was done to perfection. The bakers were perplexed, and again they sent the good bread to the prince and this time the bad bread went to Pilusedda. The prince found the pin and was astonished, while poor Pilusedda could only lament.

Now the third day arrived. When Pilusedda made her loaf, she put in a beautiful, shining ring, unique of its kind. When they baked the loaves, the same thing happened: the good loaf went to the prince, the scorched bread to Pilusedda. Breaking open the loaf, the prince found the ring and said, "If this loaf comes from Pilusedda, she cannot be an animal—she must be something else."

Now at this time a holiday was drawing near and the prince said to Pilusedda, "Would you like to come with me to the Royal Chapel?"

"How could I possibly go there?" she replied.

So the prince had to go and leave her behind. Meanwhile, she decided to

crack open the walnut, and what do you imagine was inside? There were fairies, and they had clothing, jewels, and carriages for her. She slipped out of the animal skin and into the rose-colored dress her father had made for the day she was to become a woman. She got into a carriage—so elaborate that it had twelve shutters and outrider wheels—and she arrived at the Royal Chapel. The minute the prince saw her, he was transfixed and forgot all about the Royal Chapel. Later, when she left, he called to his servants,

“Go find out where this lady lives, and come back and tell me,” he ordered.

She realized the servants were following her, so she shook out her hair, scattering pearls and diamonds. The servants, dazzled by such riches, had to give up and go back to the prince. “Your Majesty, this woman’s wealth blinded us. We beg your pardon.”

“Ah, you scoundrels, letting money blind your vision!”

Pilusedda went back into her room, placed the two halves of the nutshell together, and immediately all the fairies, carriages, and everything else disappeared. When the prince arrived there, he said to her, “Oh Pilusedda, if only you had come! There was a lady there who was unbelievably beautiful!”

“And what’s that got to do with me? All I want is to eat!”

The next week it so happened that there was another festival at the Royal Chapel. The prince told Pilusedda, but she said she wanted nothing to do with it. When he was gone, she opened the chestnut. Within seconds, the fairies were busy again, this time dressing her as the sovereign she really was—in the sea-green outfit that she had requested for the civil ceremony. When she came to the Royal Chapel, and the prince laid eyes on her, he called his servants and said, “This time open your eyes and find out who the lady is. If you fail, you are finished.”

When she left and got into her carriage, the servants were right behind her. But she flung down gold and silver, and—goodbye servants! They returned to the prince, saying, “Majesty, do what you will with us, but look at what she threw at us!”

“All right, we’ll talk about it another day.”

Pilusedda returned home, closed the chestnut, and the fairies disappeared. Days passed, and there was another Royal Chapel event. The prince told Pilusedda, but she said she was not interested. All she wanted to do was to eat. When the prince was gone, she cracked open the hazelnut, and the fairies began dressing her in the dress her father gave her for her engagement: sky-colored, embroidered with gold and precious pearls, with the sun, the moon, and all the planets. When she went to the Royal Chapel and the prince saw her, he said to his servants, “Prepare my carriage.”

After Pilusedda left the festivities, the prince was right behind her. She got into her carriage, and he followed in his.

“Where is that carriage going?” he asked.

“To the palace,” he was told.

She darted into her room, but he was right behind her and grabbed hold of her. “Oh you little schemer! It turns out I was right when I said to myself that you were fooling me. Now explain to me how it is that you are a horse but can also turn into such a beautiful woman?”

And so she finally told him her whole story.


The prince called the king and queen and told them that he wished to marry, and that his bride would be this beautiful young maiden. The king and queen were happy, because they saw that the bride was stunningly beautiful. And so the couple were wed.

Thus they lived on, in contentment and peace,

While we just sit here, picking our teeth.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 44. THE LITTLE MAGPIE

nce upon a time, so it's been told, there was a man who owned a magpie, and it served its master and did whatever he wanted. Whenever the master left the house, it went into someone else's garden that was facing their house, where there was a fig tree, and ate the figs. The bird was enchanted, and each time it left its master's house, it discarded its feathers and became a woman. After she quickly ate the figs in the garden, she left the place and went back to her master dressed in feathers and continued to serve him.

“Little magpie, little magpie,” he called. “Come to your master!”

The bird flew to his knees, and her master caressed her, and she was pleased.

One time, when her master left the house, the magpie discarded her feathers as usual and went to eat the figs. While she was there, the master happened to return home and found the feathers on a chair. He called out to her, but nobody responded. When he saw the way things were, he burned all the feathers. Then the magpie appeared dressed as a lady, and when she saw that the master had found the feathers, she turned pale. The master looked at her and said, “Ahh! So you are the little magpie?!” And he was stunned.

Finally he said, "As a magpie, you were my servant, but now I shall take you for my wife."

So he quickly made the marriage arrangements, and after they were married, they held a fine banquet.

My tale's been told and written down

Now it's your turn to tell your own.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo at Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 45. THE DOE

Once upon a time, so they say, there was a king and a queen who had two daughters, one with teeth of gold and the other with teeth of silver. As time passed, their mother died when one girl was fourteen and the other fifteen. Before she died, the queen left her husband a diamond and said that he was only to marry a woman whose finger fit that ring. Well, no matter who tried, nobody's finger could fit the ring, and the king put it on his writing desk.

One time, at the New Year, the daughters went to kiss the hand of their father, and when the eldest daughter saw the ring on the desk, she tried it on, and it was a perfect fit. The father became crazy and wanted to marry his daughter. But how could that be? The king wanted to force her, and she refused. Since the girl didn't know what to do, she threw herself at the feet of the priest and told him everything. Then the priest explained to her that it was impossible to do what her father wanted.

"Stall for time," he said. "Tell your father that you will only marry him when he brings you a dress as bright as the sun and moon."

So the princess went and told her father, who set off to find it. While he was searching, he came across a cavalier who said, "Your majesty, what are you looking for?"

The king told him everything, and the cavalier replied, "Majesty, you just rest, and I'll get the dress for you."

And indeed he got it for him, and when the king's daughter saw it, she ran off to the priest who said to her, "Listen, ask him to have another dress made with the color of the sea and fish. If he manages to get it, you're to have a very large chest made and to come here with your sister."

The girl departed and told her father what she wanted, and he found the dress. So she had a chest made and went immediately to the priest with her

sister. The priest, in turn, put them into the chest, sealed it well, and threw it into the sea.

Let's leave the two girls in the chest for a while and turn to a king who had come to the sea coast because he was sick, and the doctors had told him that, if he wanted to get well, he should spend some time near the sea. One day, he happened to notice that there was something afloat, and he wanted to fish it out. So he pulled and pulled on his line and managed to bring in the chest that he was glad to take to his palace. Once there, he opened it and found the first sister. After he presented her to his mother, he married her. One day, while they were sitting at their window, they saw a cavalier on horseback coming from a forest. The young queen looked and recognized her father. When the father drew near, and the king's attention had been turned away, he said to his daughter, "There you are, you wretch! That's it! I've asked God to turn you into a doe and make you vanish from the sight of your husband."

As you know, the curses that a mother and father make always have an effect, and so the maiden quickly thought of something to do before she was to become a doe. She went straight to the chest and got her sister out to replace her and told her everything that happened. She said to her that if the king asked why she has teeth of silver, she was to respond that the Madonna had changed them and that she had made a vow not to sleep with her husband for six months. So, the sister who was enchanted as a doe departed for the forest. When the sister who remained behind saw the king, she told him everything that her sister had told her to say, and he believed her. After some time passed, the king decided to amuse himself and went hunting in the forest. While he was eating, the doe came to his side and began annoying him so much that he became mad. He picked up his gun and fired at her. The doe was wounded and ran to the palace where she regained her human form, bandaged her arm, and dressed herself as she was before. Then the king arrived and told the sister who had not been enchanted what had happened, and she then showed him the sister who had become a doe. In the end, they all remained happy and content.

*Told to Pitriè at Noto.*

## 46. THE HUMPBACK



Once upon a time there was a king with three daughters ready to be married. The two eldest were pretty and got married right away. The youngest had a humpback, nobody wanted her, and the king

couldn't even give her away or sell her. Finally, the coachman wanted her, and she said yes.

"What should I do?" she said. "My sisters got married. Shouldn't I, too?"

"But, daughter, you'll lower yourself," her father said.

"Your majesty, what should I do if nobody wants me?"

They arranged the marriage, and she took the coachman. But her sisters continued to dislike and scorn her, and they said many mean things to her because she had a humpback and was married to the coachman. As a result, she wept and became melancholy. While she was weeping, three fairies passed by.

"What's wrong, Richetta? Why are you so tormented?"

"What should I do? My sisters detest me. They don't want to be near me. They say that the crown belongs to them because I'm a humpback, and I'm there for their amusement."

"All right!" the fairies said. "Take this chestnut, hazelnut, and walnut. They'll help you when you're in need."

Upon saying this, they went off on their business traveling around the world. Time passed, and her father was aging.

"Since I am now very old," he said, "I want to divest myself of the crown and pass it on to one of my heirs to take over the reign. So, listen my daughters, I shall give the crown to whoever embroiders the most beautiful gold cover."

The two older sisters were both very glad.

"Ahh, good! The crown is ours!"

And the poor hunchback withdrew and said to herself, "How could I possibly embroider a cover like this?"

Meanwhile the sisters bought gold and silver and all the silk they could find. All Richetta could do was to call the servant and send him to cry out beneath the window of her sisters.

"Who has gold thread and pearls to embroider the king's cover?"

"Ahh! That's certainly the servant sent by our turtle of a sister!" they sneered. "The crown is ours."

The day came for the presentation of the cover to the king, and what did Richetta do? Well, she broke open the hazelnut, and all at once a marvelous cover appeared embroidered with gold and precious pearls. Never had a cover like this ever been seen before!

"Ohh! How beautiful! Ohh! How beautiful!" the king said. "There's nothing like this in the world! Certainly you have lost the contest, my two daughters."

But he placed another condition on the crown. How could he possibly give it to a humpback? So, what did he do?

"Whoever wants the crown," he said, "must do something else. I want you to breed a beautiful, gentle, and tiny lapdog, the best there is."

Just think what the sisters could do!

"This time, the crown will definitely be ours."

And they began to breed very charming lapdogs. Meanwhile the hunchback's servant paced back and forth beneath their window.

"Who has a crust of hard bread that my lady can use to breed a lapdog for the king?"

"Ohh!" they said. "She did it with the cover! Let's give her a piece of hard bread!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"No!"

They argued until they did nothing. Then the time arrived to carry the lapdog to the king. Their turtle of a sister withdrew into her shell, and when she reached the middle of the stairs, she broke open the chestnut, and a lapdog popped out. It was more beautiful and precious than any puppy that could have come from the womb of a dog.

"Ohh! What a rare dog!" the king said. "How did you ever breed a dog like this one?"

"Only God knows how I bred it. Nobody on earth or in heaven knows, and if He is silent about this, so am I!"

"I should give you the crown," the king said, "but I'm not going to offer it to you yet because there's one more test. Do you know who'll get the crown now? Whoever is the best dressed and most beautiful."

At this point things were clear. The sisters were beautiful and happy. They could now sleep soundly on soft pillows. But the coachman, in desperation, said, "Ahh! This time we'll get the crown since my wife has already won it twice!"

The time arrived for the daughters to present themselves to the king. The turtle of a sister appeared with her many humps and said, "Get the best coach because now I'm going."

Along the way she broke open the walnut, and immediately she became the goddess Venus in person, dressed like the richest and most gracious lady there ever was. Wherever she passed along the way, she glistened and sent off rays as they were from the sun. What's there to tell you? The king and the sisters remained so astounded that they could not utter a word or open their mouths. And Richetta was triumphant and laughed.

"Ahh! Did you really think that I was a humpback? The crown is mine!"

"You're right." the king said. "Take the crown. There's nothing to say. I

can't do anything for you two, my daughters. The rule of this land and realm belongs to Richetta."

So Richetta and her husband were crowned queen and king.

They remained happy and in peace  
while we sit here and pick our teeth.

*Told by Nina Fedele and collected by Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 47. THE TAILOR AND THE DUNG-MAIDEN

Here's a fine tale that people tell over and again.

Once upon a time there was a tailor, who went around making clothes for all the ladies and gentlemen. One day he was summoned to a house to cut a suit. After he was finished, he saved all the remnants in a bag, said goodbye to the lady of the house, and left.

When he was outside, he suddenly felt nature's calling—pardon my expression—and he could hardly hold himself in. He found a sunken courtyard space, bent down, and did what he had to do. Then he took the remnants he had saved and used them to dress up the—do I have to say it? Well, that's what the story says he did—he dressed up what he had made, and let me show you how it was.<sup>67</sup>

At this moment some fairies happened to pass by, and one of them asked, "What is this thing?"

Another said, "Why don't we turn it into a woman?"

And a third one said, "Let me give her a diamond."

And so she gave her a diamond, and the thing became a beautiful young woman. She remained, however, incapable of any motion.

The days passed, and along came the king's son.

"What a beautiful young woman!" he exclaimed and ordered his footman to go and bring her into the royal coach with him. The footman approached her with this request, but all the girl would say was, "Shit, shit." So the footman had to pick her up and carry her.

Once she was in the coach, the prince asked, "Who are you?"

<sup>67</sup> The storyteller made a gesture at this point in the story. Pitre has an interesting note on the embarrassment the storyteller feels at having to recount this "indecent" detail. She blushes and uses a gesture to describe what she hesitates to put into words, the size of the turd. With "the story says," she makes it clear that the choice of indecent detail is not hers but comes with the tale.

“Shit, shit,” she replied.

“Now that’s no way for the woman who is going to be my wife to talk,” said the prince. “We’re on our way to the palace, so I can introduce you to my mother.”

But all the woman would say was:

“Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit.”

And as the carriage went along, he continued talking to her, and she continued answering nothing more than “Shit, shit!”

When they arrived at the palace, she was still saying, “Shit, shit!” and the prince was growing more and more upset that this woman, who was so remarkably beautiful, had such a terrible manner of speaking. He thought of sending her away, but couldn’t really imagine doing it. He also lacked the courage to introduce her to his mother. Finally, he decided he would lock her in his room and teach her how a person behaves properly. So he locked her in, and they began living there together.

The day eventually came when the prince had to go out, and he kept the key safely in his pocket. His mother, however, couldn’t help wondering who the prince was keeping in his room. Since she had her own copy of his key, she opened the door and went in. The young woman stood up and said:

“Shit, shit, shit, shit, shit, shit!”

“How dare this ill-mannered creature use such language with me! How can a son of mine bring such a person to our house? As soon as he returns, he will have to throw her into the ocean, if he knows what’s good for him!”

So when the prince returned, she told him as much, and they gave orders to throw the maiden into the ocean because of her foul language. After lunch the prince went out with the maiden and his footman, hoping to make one last attempt to persuade her to speak more properly and clean up her language. But all that the maiden would say was: “Shit! Shit!”

They started on their way, and along the roadside they saw a well. “Shit, shit!” she said. The prince realized this meant she wanted a drink, and he let her get down. Approaching the well, she removed the diamond from her finger and set it on the rim of the well. She took a drink and said to the prince:

“How delicious this water is!”

She spoke! The prince was so thrilled when he saw she could finally speak correctly that he had her get back into the carriage, and they returned to the palace. She had, however, forgotten her ring and had left it at the well.

Now the prince had a lady whose speech was as beautiful as she looked. However, she realized that she had forgotten her ring and wanted to go back for it. Instead the prince turned to one of his pages and ordered him to go and

fetch it. He went, and as soon as he found it and put it on, he began shouting, “Shit, shit!” and waving his finger in the air. The prince had another boy sent, and the same thing happened to him, and he began shouting “Shit, shit!”

Now the prince realized what the problem was. He found a new ring to give to his fiancée and kept the enchanted one himself. The maiden was happy with this solution.

At the royal palace, the queen could now see that this young maiden was truly beautiful and had finally stopped using disgraceful speech. And so the prince married the maiden, and they all had a grand celebration.

So they became husband and wife, so sweet,  
While we still have no shoes for our feet.

*Told by Elisabetta Sanfratello in Valledlunga.*

## 48. ANGELICA’S RING

**H**ere’s a tale told time and again, my good gentlemen—there was once a woman called Angelica, and she possessed an enchanted ring which had no equal in its magical powers. Seven devils had created this ring, and so for good reason, it had seven special powers. These devils were Farfaricchiu, Maumettu, and Malacarni, which makes three. Then Sgranfugninu, which makes four; and then Cicirittu, Cudatorta, and finally Bezzaù—no, let me correct that, Bezzabù—and that makes seven.<sup>68</sup>

Bezzabù was the ringleader, and so it was he who said one day to the company of devils:

“Listen, my friends, I’ve had an idea. For some time now people aren’t coming to hell the way they used to in the good old days when we were constantly announcing the Jubilee. I don’t know whether it’s because of the work of the preachers, or our own lack of skill, or just plain bad luck. But whatever the cause, the facts are plain, and if we don’t do something about it, we’ll soon be out of business. So here’s my plan: let’s devise some kind of magical net that we can use to catch people. First we’ll catch the simpletons

<sup>68</sup> Most of these names have transparently malign meanings, e.g. Malacarni (“evil flesh”), Cudatorta (“crooked tail”), Bezzabù (a version of Beelzebub). Maumettu is “Mohammed,” often used as a negative figure in these tales (so folk memory records the Saracen presence in Sicily). Sgranfugninu suggests scratching. Farfaricchiu is a generic name for evil spirits (cf. tale 53, “Virgil the Sorcerer,” for a devil called Farfareddu, a variant of Farfaricchiu, who punishes his victim by scratching her terribly). Cicirittu, which is a diminutive of “ciciru” (Italian *cece*), “chick-pea,” seems the one name in the group with no bad connotations.

because that's easy enough. Then we'll catch the clever ones, too, because of their own cleverness. And finally we'll take in anyone and everyone who comes along."

All the devils agreed with Bezzabù. So, they made a ring with seven powers and gave it to the oldest and foulest witch there ever was. They themselves placed it on her finger, and the seven powers of the ring were as follows.

First, it made whoever wore it look beautiful, and second it made that person look young. Third, the wearer was endowed with an eye that could bring disaster to any person it looked at. Fourth, it enabled the owner of the ring to speak with a sweetness that could put people under a spell. Fifth, the person who wore the ring had kisses that could burn people and left a red mark on their foreheads without their being aware of it. Sixth was the power to suck the blood from the veins of whoever came near, causing the victim to die without realizing what was happening. And seventh, those who joined up with the owner of the ring would never be able to get free and would die in mortal sin.

And there is something else that the devils gave to the old witch Angelica—the power to fly over all the world, striking more deadly than a thunderbolt wherever she wanted. So in the twinkling of an eye she could be and has been everywhere. Angelica scoured the world collecting souls and sending them to Hell. Sweet Jesus, I couldn't begin to recount all the havoc she has wrought! But if you go and ask older folk than myself, they can give you a full reckoning, point by point.

My children, you must truly be careful: this story about Angelica's ring is no fairy tale, it's real! Angelica is still alive and will always be. She continues to roam the world, carrying her cargo of souls to hell. This was the purpose of the devils in setting her in our midst.

And whoever tells this tale, or has it told,  
Her dreadful claws can never hold.

*Told by Rosa Amari to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 49. THE BARBER'S CLOCK

**M**y good gentlemen, let me tell you a tale told time and again. Indeed, once upon a time there was a barber who had a clock that had run for many centuries without tiring. It kept perfect time without anyone ever having to wind it, and it never ran late. Only once did the

barber wind it up, and from then on it just kept going tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock . . .

Now this barber was very old, so old that he himself had lost track of how many centuries old he was, and how many different people's religions he had seen come and go. All the townspeople would run to him in his shop to ask the clock their most important questions, because this was a magic clock.

For instance, a farmer would come, tired and desperate because he needed water for planting, and the sky was simply refusing to rain.

"Clock, tell me when it's going to rain."

And the clock would answer,

"Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock.  
As long as my color is red like a stain,  
I shall rule and there'll be no rain.  
Tumbalee, Tumbaloo, Tumbalay,  
If it doesn't shower now, next year will bring rain."<sup>69</sup>

An old man would come, leaning on his cane, so asthmatic he could scarcely catch his breath, and would ask,

"Oh clock, tell me if my lamp has enough oil."

And the clock's reply would be,

"Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock,  
Between sixty and seventy when it was damp,  
You used up all the oil in your lamp.  
From seventy-one, when you become sick,  
You'll struggle just to light the wick."<sup>70</sup>

Then there were the young men madly in love, dressed to the nines, laughing with self-satisfaction, who asked—as if they already knew the answer—

"Oh clock, isn't it true that no one is enjoying love's kingdom better than we are?"

And the clock's reply was,

69 *Mentri sugnu russu eu*  
*L'acqua nun veni, lu duminiu è meu;*  
*Truniannu, truniannu,*  
*S' 'un chiovi aguannu, chiovi n'âtr'annu.*

70 *Di sisanta a li sittanta*  
*Cci spiddiu l'ógghiu a la lampà:*  
*Doppu l'annu sittantunu*  
*Adduca a stentu lu mécciu sulu!*

“Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock.  
 This kingdom’s ruler can hardly be trusted:  
 You’re happy today, tomorrow it’s busted.  
 Today you seem fine and brave,  
 Tomorrow you’re in your grave.”<sup>71</sup>

Among those who came was the out-and-out criminal, the chief gangster of the realm with his beret pulled down over his long curly locks, all covered with buttons and rings. With his derisive gangster’s slur he said:

“Hey, you, clock! Answer me this: is there anyone strong enough to escape my clutches? Why, I could even stop you from running if I wanted!”

And the clock, answering even more derisively:

“Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock.  
 If you run over razors without any shoes,  
 The soles of your feet you’re certain to lose!”<sup>72</sup>

Then there came the poor afflicted man, hungry and ill-clothed, with ailments from head to toe.

“Oh clock, tell me when these troubles will end? Have mercy and tell me when death will take me.”

And the clock answered in the same way:

“Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock,  
 The unhappy and the afflicted,  
 Are often given more days than expected.”<sup>73</sup>

And so the story goes: all kinds of people came to see this marvelous clock and get answers to their questions. Indeed, this clock knew when the fruits were going to ripen; it could tell when winter and summer were coming, and at what hour the dawn and the sunset would come; it knew when everyone had been born and how long ago the town had been created. In short, the clock was a mechanical wonder, a clock with no equal anywhere because there was nothing it didn’t know. All the people would have liked to have it in their homes, but to no avail: no one could have it because it was magic. Yet

71 Ssu rignanti 'un havi giudiziu,  
 Oggi filici, dumanì 'ntra lu pricipiziu;  
 Oggi in figura,  
 Dumanì 'ntra la sipurtura!

72 Cui curri scàusu supra li rasola,  
 O prima o doppu cci lassa la sola.


73 A li 'nfilici e a li disgraziati  
 Spissu cchiù jorna cci su' destinati.

everyone, willingly or unwillingly, secretly or openly, had to praise the old barber who had the skill to create such a marvelous clock that would run forever. And there was no one who could take this clock apart and hold it in his hands, except for the Master who had made it.

And whoever tells this tale, or has it told,  
An unpleasant death can never hold.

*Told by Rosa Amari to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 50. GIVE ME THE VEIL!

nce upon a time there was a young man who was thoroughly miserable. His life was worse than a dog's. Since this poor soul had nothing to eat, and not even water to drink, he decided to sit by the harbor, hoping to find something to keep him from starving to death.

He had been sitting there a while, when along came a Levantine Greek,<sup>74</sup> who said to him, "My handsome young fellow, what's wrong? What makes you so sad?"

"Why shouldn't I be sad?" answered the young man. "I'm dying of hunger, with nothing to eat and no hope of getting anything."

"Oh my poor lad, cheer up! Come along with me, and I'll give you food, money, and whatever else you need."

The young man was completely captivated, poor fellow, and the man led him this way and that, finally arriving at the foot of a mountain. He struck the ground with his staff, and immediately the earth opened up and a winged horse appeared. The Greek turned to the young man and said, "Look over there, do you see that mountain-top? There are all kinds of treasures up there. Mount this winged horse, fly there, and collect all the precious stones and gold ingots, load them on the horse, and when I signal to you, bring them here to me."

And that's exactly what the young man did. He mounted the horse and *zoom!*—in an instant he was there. And what was up there? All kinds of God's gifts: breathtaking ingots of gold, the most brilliant diamond gems, and

<sup>74</sup> *Grecu-livanti* in Sicilian, a Levantine Greek. We have translated this name throughout the tale simply as "the Greek." Pitre notes that this was a kind of bogey-man figure used to threaten children who behaved badly. When children wanted to go outdoors, they were told to remain indoors, and parents would say, "If you don't watch out, the grecu-livanti will come and catch you."

more treasures than I could ever name. The young man felt frightened at the sight of so much great wealth. But he managed to load the horse with all these things, and at a sign from the Greek he mounted the horse again and brought everything back.

“Hooray for you, Bravo!” exclaimed the Greek. “You really are a clever lad.”

The Greek had him mount the horse for two more trips, and at the third trip he said to him, “Go now, and this time you can keep for yourself anything you find.”

The poor lad set out to follow these instructions and went a third time to take the remaining treasures that would be his own. But just as he had begun to load up the horse, the treacherous man struck the ground with the staff and *whoosh!*—the horse vanished from the top of the mountain, and the Greek vanished from the bottom of the mountain, and the youth found himself all alone.

He had no way to get down from such a height, so he began walking, trusting in God and whatever fortune might bring him. Walking this way and that way he finally met an old woman, who asked him, “You there, where do you think you’re going? Why have you come to this place?”

“Oh mother,” he said, “you should only know what’s happened to me,” and he proceeded to tell her his whole story.

“Enough, enough,” said the old woman. “I know it all. Every year that Greek leaves somebody abandoned up here. All right, my poor little fellow, just come along with me, and I’ll make you rich.”

The boy answered—but speaking in a low voice only to himself—“I’ve already been made rich twice today, so let’s hope this won’t be like the last one. Otherwise, I may have to strangle this old witch!”

After they had gone some distance, she brought him to a beautiful fountain and said to him, “Look here, do you see this beautiful fountain? Every morning twelve doves come here to drink. They dip themselves into the water and come back out as twelve young girls beautiful as the sun, with veils covering their faces, and they begin to play among themselves. It’s a wonderful sight to behold! All you have to do is find a hiding place and then, when they are at the height of their playing, snatch the veil from the most beautiful of them and tuck it under your shirt. She’ll call to you, ‘Give me the veil, give me the veil!’ but you must be very careful not to surrender it, otherwise she’ll turn back into a dove again and fly off with the others.”

So the young man found himself a perfect hiding place and waited for the next day when the doves would come. Morning came. The hour grew near. The young man kept completely silent. And finally, he heard a rushing noise

that grew louder and louder. He looked out and saw a flock of doves approaching. Squeezing himself down deeper into his hiding place, he said to himself, "Be still now, because here they come."

The doves repeated their custom of arriving at the fountain, drinking, and then dipping themselves into the water and turning into twelve beautiful maidens. Indeed, they looked like twelve angels just descended from heaven! Then they began running around wildly and playing their games.

The young man slowly emerged from his hiding place, waited for the perfect moment, and with a quick gesture snatched the veil from one of the maidens who passed right by him. Then he put it into a little box that the old woman had given him and tucked it under his shirt. Well, what do you think happened next? All those maidens turned back into doves and flew away, vanishing into the air. You can imagine the misery of that young maiden when she saw that she was left alone with the young man. All she could do was cry, "Give me the veil! Give me the veil!"

And he answered, "Sing, little rooster, for you have such a lovely voice!"

Then he walked all the way home, following a long path that the old witch had shown him, and handed the maiden over to his mother.

"Mother, you must be very careful and never let her go outside, do you hear? If you fail me, we are lost!"

"There's no need to worry," replied his mother. "No one here is going to send her out."

So the young man went out on some business of his own, and the maiden had to remain behind with her mother-in-law. All day long this maiden did nothing but repeat over and over again, "Give me the veil, give me the veil." Indeed, she began to drive the mother crazy. Finally she couldn't stand it any longer and said, "Holy Mary, what's wrong with you? I can't stand this constant ringing in my ears, like a bell that won't stop! All right, I'll give you the veil."

The good woman recalled that she had put it inside the drawer of a chest. She opened the drawer, saw a little box, opened it, and found the veil.

"Could it be this one, my child?"

The young maiden didn't even wait for her to unfold it, but instantly snatched it, put it over her face, turned into a dove, and disappeared.

The old woman, poor thing, was completely grief-stricken.

"Oh me, oh my, now what am I going to say to my son when he returns and finds his beautiful girl is gone?"

She had scarcely finished speaking these words when she heard the ringing of the doorbell. Her son had returned. He entered and immediately saw that his treasure was gone. What in the world was he to do?

He ran off in a state of utter despair and returned to the same place where he had met the Greek. Well, to make a long story short, the same things happened all over again. The Greek came and put him on the winged horse, made the horse disappear, and the old woman came and told him to go to the fountain and steal the veil from one of the maidens. He took the girl home, but his mother gave her the veil again, and she disappeared.

When it came around to the third time, and he met the old woman once again, she said to him, "You fool! Didn't you know it would turn out like this? Let me tell you what you must do. Repeat everything, but this time, when you've stolen the veil from the maiden, bring it here to me, and I'll take care of it."

So that's exactly what he did: he hid again in the same place, and when he saw the same things happening, he stole the veil from one of the beautiful maidens and brought it to the old witch.

"Ah, now you've done the right thing!"

And what did she do? She took the veil and burned it. Now that unfortunate young fellow was happy at last and started back to his house, taking the maiden with him.

When they arrived, the first thing he did was ask her whose daughter she was, and she told him her father was the King of Spain. Upon hearing this, the young man grew excited and said, "Now at last I can be rich!"

So what did he do? He set out to take the girl back to her father. They arrived at the palace and had it announced that a young man was here with the king's daughter. Overjoyed at the news, the king ordered them to come up immediately and present themselves, and they did. You can imagine how thrilled the king was to see his daughter again! He hugged her and kissed her and showed all the affection of a father who had not seen his daughter for twelve years.

Then he ordered a great feast to be prepared to celebrate his daughter's return. As a reward for the young man who had brought her back, he decided to offer his daughter in marriage. And so the whole day was given over to celebrating the young couple. When the king learned that the boy had a mother, he had her brought to the palace as well. So, the couple were wed,

And they remained happy and in peace,  
While we still sit here and grind our teeth.

*Collected in Palermo from a woman whose name Pitriè did not recall.*

## 51. THE LITTLE MONK

And now I'm going to tell a tale that's pretty scary—the tale of the little monk.<sup>75</sup>

They say that once upon a time there were two monks, an older one and a younger one. Each year they went out on a quest because they were really poor. Well, one time they set out and took a very rough path. The younger said to the older, “This isn't our path,” but the other replied, “That doesn't matter, keep walking.”

They finally came to a very big cave, and inside was a creature making a fire. But they didn't believe anyone was there. One of the monks said,

“Let's go in and lie down.”

So they went in, and the creature was killing sheep and cooking them on the fire (because he kept sheep). When they were inside and met the creature, he killed twenty sheep and cooked them. Then he commanded the two monks to eat.

“We don't want to. We're not hungry.”

“Eat, I said!”

Once they had eaten all the sheep, they lay down to sleep. Well, now the devil got up (this creature happened to be the devil), took a huge rock, and stuck it in the opening of the cave. Then he took a very sharp iron stake, heated it, stuck it through the neck of the older monk, cooked him, and then asked the younger one to join him in eating.

“I'm not really hungry enough to eat right now,” he protested.

“You'd better get up this instant, otherwise I'll kill you!”

So the little monk got up, sat at the table, and the poor wretch took a small piece and pretended to eat—but he kept throwing the pieces on the ground.

“My God, I really am full!” he exclaimed.

During the night the good little monk grabbed the iron, heated it, and stuck in the monster's eyes, which crackled and burst.

“Oh help! He's murdering me!”

Sheer fright drove the little monk to hide by burying himself in the wool of the sheep. The monster then got up, groped his way to the opening of the cave, removed the stone, and drove his sheep out one at a time. Finally he came to the sheep where he thought the little monk was hiding, but he wasn't

<sup>75</sup> This tale shows some awkwardness in style and structure, and this is not surprising since the narrator was an 8-year-old girl. See further details in the endnote.

there! He had escaped and gone to Trapani, to the sea. There were lots of boats and sailors there, and he said,

“Just give me a place here with you, and I’ll tell you my whole story.”

Well, he got into the boat, but the monster came looking for him, and the sailors set out to sea as fast as they could. As the boat was leaving, the monster picked up a huge rock, but since he was blind, he stumbled and fell and broke his head. So much blood came out of him that the entire sea turned red. The young fellow got away, and the monster stayed there.

And that’s the end of the story.

*Told by Maria Curatolo in Erice.*

## 52. THE TUFT OF WILD BEET

**H**ere’s a tale people like to tell.

Once upon a time there was a father and mother who had an only child named Vicenzu. One day, when they couldn’t find anything to eat, the father said,

“What do you say, my boy? Let’s go looking for something to make for tonight’s soup.”

And that’s what they did. But as they walked far and wide, they found the whole countryside as smooth as the top of a hat, not a cabbage, fennel, or beetroot in sight. After walking some two miles without finding anything, they grew tired and discouraged. Suddenly, Vicenzu saw a large, handsome tuft of wild beet, enough for two days’ food.

He went to pull it up but couldn’t get it out of the ground, it was so firmly rooted. So he called his father, and they pulled together and in turns, until finally they yanked it out, leaving a big hole in the ground. Dark smoke began pouring out of this hole, and into the midst of the smoke leaped what looked like a sack of black cloth. Who could it be? None other than Papa-Dragu the ogre.

The father and son were struck speechless with fear. But Papa-Dragu said,

“Have no fear! I’m not going to hurt you. Just give me Vicenzu for a year, a month, and a day. If at the end of this time”—he said to the father—“you can recognize your son, you’ll have him back. If you can’t recognize him, he stays with me.”

The poor father felt trapped and could do nothing but bow his head in consent. The ogre dismissed him with these words:

"Here, take these two hundred ducats. They will make your wife feel better, and you both can eat for a year."

When the father had gone, the ogre tapped Vicenzu and turned him into a little chick. Then he picked him up and put him in a cage full of chicks, all of them little boys that he had similarly enchanted.

Now let's leave him and go back to the father. When the year, month, and day had passed, he dreamed a dream in which his son appeared to him and said,

"Father, the ogre has turned me into a little chick. If you want to break the spell, you must be able to recognize me amongst a crowd of chicks. I can help by giving you a signal: when you put your hand into the cage of chicks, I'll be the one that jumps up on your hand."

The father woke up, went out, and walked until he came to the ogre's house. He yanked up the wild beet, smoke poured out, the black sack appeared, and it was Papa-Dragu.

"Come here and tell me if you recognize your son. He is one of the chicks in this cage."

The father felt completely at a loss because all the chicks were white and all came right up to him. But when one of them jumped up on his hand, he was filled with joy.

"This is my son! This is my son!" he declared.

The ogre, angry and frustrated, had no choice but to give him his son.

"Go! Leave this place! But don't think that I won't get even with you!"

Father and son departed. Then Vicenzu, who had returned to his human form, said, "We should have something to bring back to mother. Look here, I have magical powers. I'll turn myself into a dog, and we'll go hunting. We'll meet some hunters, and when they ask to buy me, you'll sell me for two hundred ducats that you can bring to mother. You must be very careful, however, to say you're selling me *without the collar*. If you forget, there's no way for me to come back to you."

And that's what they did. He became a dog and began catching hares and rabbits in large numbers, then roosters, wild doves, and partridges, and he brought them all to his father. The father, loaded down with all this game, met a royal hunting party, all princes and barons and king's sons, who were leading a big pack of dogs. They were greatly discouraged because they hadn't been able to catch a single thing. When they saw Vicenzu's father with such rich game, they asked, "My good fellow, how did you manage to catch so much?"

"Oh, it was because of this dog I have."

"What an exceptional animal! Is he for sale?"

"My lords, I really couldn't do without him. But to show my great respect for your lordships, let me say two hundred ducats, *but without his collar*."

"We certainly don't need this cheap collar. Here, take it, along with the two hundred ducats, and the dog is ours."

The father left with the two hundred ducats, and the hunters left with the dog.

When they began hunting, the dog went after a rabbit and vanished from sight. The instant he was alone, he said, "Dog I am and man I become," and he turned back into Vicenzu.<sup>76</sup> Soon after, he met the hunters, all tired and out of breath.

"You there, my lad, did you see a handsome dog, about this size?"

"No, sir."

And so they went off this way and that, running around looking for the dog. Vicenzu rejoined his father, and the two of them went home.

A few days passed, and there happened to be a fair in a nearby town. Vicenzu said to his father, "Do you know what I'm thinking? I can turn myself into a horse, and you can take me to the fair and sell me for two hundred ducats, *without the halter*. But be very careful to say *without the halter*. If you forget, I have to remain a horse."

So Vicenzu became a horse, and his father took him to the fair. But Papa-Dragu also happened to be there. He was looking for little boys that he had turned into chicks but who had escaped and then learned to make money by turning themselves into animals. When the ogre came upon Vicenzu in the shape of a handsome horse, he recognized him at once.

"My good man, how much do you want for this horse?"

"Two hundred ducats . . ." began the father. But before he had time to add *without the halter*, the ogre tossed him a sack of two hundred ducats and seized the horse.

"Wait, sir, I'm selling him *without the halter*," said the father.

"Oh no, he's all mine now. You had to say those words before making the sale!"

"But sir, please listen. . . ."

"No way." And Papa-Dragu took away the horse, or, to be precise, Vicenzu. He took him to an inn and tied him to a feeding trough, but gave him

76 Vicenzu's words are "*Cani sugnu e cristianu mi fazzu*." As we see elsewhere, *cristianu*, "Christian," is a standard Sicilian expression to denote "man" or "human."

neither food nor drink. Then he took a very big stick, and—*whack! whack!*—he began beating him all over.<sup>77</sup>

“Do you remember, Vicenzu, when you got away from me? Well, I’m the ogre, and you’re not getting away from me again! Your life is now entirely in my hands. Didn’t I say I’d get even with you?”

He beat him night and day and kept him starving so that the poor horse’s condition would move even the stones to pity.

One day the ogre happened to go out, and the stable boy found the horse and felt sorry for him.

“Poor beast!” he said. “What a terrible master you have! Let me at least give you something to drink, and wash these wounds on your back.”

So he brought the animal to the fountain, and in order to clean him better, he took off the halter. At this very moment the ogre returned.

“You there! What are you doing? Why are you taking that off? Put it back on at once!”

But Vicenzu heard the voice of the ogre approaching, and having no wish to wait for him, he uttered the words, “Horse I am and eel I become,” and threw himself into the fountain.

The ogre said, “Man I am and shark I become!” and jumped into the fountain to chase the eel. The eel eventually grew tired and said, “Eel I am and vulture I become!” and he flew off in a great burst of speed. Then the ogre said, “Shark I am and eagle I become!” and began chasing the vulture with even greater speed.

The vulture was about to be caught, when he spied the king’s daughter on her balcony. “Vulture I am and ring I become!” he cried, and turned into a ring and landed on the brim of the princess’s hat. “What a beautiful ring!” she exclaimed when she saw it fall, and she put it on her finger. The ogre in his eagle form was just swooping down to catch the ring, but when he saw the princess put it on, there was nothing he could do. He had to turn back and fold his wings.

Now let’s leave him and follow Vicenzu, who had taken the form of a ring. Night came, and the princess was asleep. “Ring I am and man I become!” he said, and turned back into the handsome lad he was. The princess awoke and saw him and was afraid. But Vicenzu calmed her, telling her his whole story, and the two of them spent the night together. In the morning he became a ring again, and she kept him on her finger.

Now the princess began to worry that her father would find out the truth

77 This same onomatopoeic phrase—representing the sound of thrashing with a stick—is also used in the tale, “Virgil the Sorcerer.” The original Sicilian is *tiritimpiti tiritampiti*.

one of these evenings, and being constantly in a worried state, she fell ill. This became an illness that nobody could cure, since nobody knew its cause.

When Papa-Dragu the ogre heard of this, he decided to disguise himself as a doctor and go to the palace.

"Your majesty, I can make your daughter well again," he said to the king, "but you must promise to give me the ring from her finger."

The king agreed, but the princess would not hear of it. That evening she told all this to Vicenzu.

"All right," he said, "you can give me to him, but on one condition, if you love me. When the ogre holds out his hand, instead of giving me to him, you must let me fall on the ground."

The next day the ogre arrived promptly to get the ring. The princess took it off her finger and let it fall on the ground. "Ring I am and pomegranate I become!" Vicenzu said, and turned into a pomegranate, split open with all its seeds scattered on the ground. "Man I am and rooster I become!" said the ogre, and he began pecking up all the pomegranate seeds. There was only one seed left, and just as he was about to gobble it up, Vicenzu said, "Pomegranate I am and weasel I become!"

The weasel sprang at the rooster's head and swallowed it whole in a single bite. Then he turned back into a man and asked the king's permission to marry his daughter. The king wasn't ready to say yes, but the princess grew so insistent that in the end they were married that very day.

The next day Vicenzu went to where the tuft of wild beet was, entered the dead ogre's palace, and released all the little chicks from the spell that kept them enchanted. Then he gathered up all the ogre's treasures and brought them to his own palace.

Now we can leave Vicenzu, happy with his new bride, and turn to the prince of a neighboring kingdom, whose wealth and power had no limits. This prince had been planning to marry the princess who was now wed to Vicenzu, and so now he was in a fury over losing her. He assembled an army so vast that it blotted out the sun, and he declared war against the king who was Vicenzu's father-in-law. One morning the king woke up, looked out his window, and saw that his castle was surrounded by soldiers, who were preparing to demolish his walls.

"Vicenzu, what can we do? Surely we're lost!"

"Leave it to me," said Vicenzu, "I'll take care of it."

He went to his room, made a circle, and spoke three words of black magic.

"At your orders!" said a voice.

"I order all the devils in hell to come here and defend this castle!"

In the wink of an eye it was raining devils: a hundred thousand black devils poured down, each with a red beret, red moustache, and red eyes that flashed sparks of flame. They made the earth itself shake with fear.

The soldiers were about to attack, but when they saw these devils facing them all along the castle walls, they cried out, "Who in the world would want to attack *them*?" and they turned and ran away as fast as they could. The prince himself became so frightened that he immediately asked to make peace with Vicenzu's father-in-law.

Eventually it came to pass that Vicenzu himself became king of the land. He remained happy living with his royal wife, while we here lead a beggar's life.

*Told by Francesca Leto to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borsetto.*

### 53. VIRGIL THE SORCERER

**H**ere's a tale people like to tell, and it's for you, my good gentlemen. Once upon a time there was a very great and powerful sorcerer named Virgil, who controlled the diabolic arts better than anyone else. Now I must digress here, gentlemen, and add that when he was quite young he had taken a wife and thereby ruined himself completely, because this wife was a holy terror, a bundle of vices and defects. She was arrogant and disrespectful, and beneath her good looks she was truly a curse to her husband, making him wear the horns time and again.<sup>78</sup> How else can I put it? A little today, a little more tomorrow, and finally the horns feel like they're burning, and there's hell to pay.

Well, this sorcerer Virgil became friends with Malagigi, the most powerful master of black magic, who straddled the broom to summon the dark spirits. Virgil told him all about his wife's doings, and Malagigi felt so sorry for him that he recited the following spell:

"Turn and turn again,  
How the wife pesters her man!  
Spin around and ride,  
Three spirits, come to my side!

<sup>78</sup> "To wear horns" is a standard idiom for being a cuckolded husband.

Without our powerful sorcery,  
She will win every victory!”<sup>79</sup>

As he recited this refrain, he spun his magic reels, big ones and little ones. Then he took his wand and made devils rain down all over the place, as thick as flies. And so, in the briefest of time, he inducted Virgil into the magical arts. Virgil became so powerful that all he had to do was draw three circles and call, and the frightened devils came running to take orders from him. He controlled them night and day and would send them to perform one task after another, like so many dogs.

But he put his greatest effort into taking revenge on his wife. She used to drive him to such despair that he was almost out of his mind, and so now he made her run the same circles.<sup>80</sup> First he made her the wife of Farfareddu, who clawed her mercilessly, threw her into a pool of sulfur and fire, and left her lying in bed half roasted. Then he gave her to Lucifer the chief, who gave her so many lashings with his tail and horns that she was a mass of punctures and sores. Then he gave her to Carnazza, who blew her up like a swollen wine-skin and then beat her with a stick *whack! whack!*<sup>81</sup> By the end, he had that poor suffering woman stripped of every possible comfort.

Of course, good sirs, that woman deserved everything she got, and more. But her husband did things too horrible to tell, so that the devils themselves began to feel sorry for her. However, they still had to carry out Virgil the Sorcerer’s orders because he controlled them with his powerful wand. We know that anyone with a wand in his hand is likely to abuse power.<sup>82</sup>

Well, it finally did reach the point where even the devils could no longer endure it, and Death herself came to claim Virgil, God be praised! And then the devils ran to make a deal with the souls in hell: “Don’t let that fellow come in here, the miserable cuckold! Otherwise he’ll want to take over and give orders to everyone.”

So they put chains and bars on the gates of Hell to keep him out.

Virgil arrived and knocked, “Tat-a-tat.”

79 Gira, rigira,  
La mughieri sempri tira;  
Gira, firria,  
Tri spirdi appressu di mia;  
Senza forza di magaria  
La mughieri cumanna e duminia.

80 Pitrè suggests that the metaphor here evokes a horse being made to run in circles at a riding-school.

81 This forceful idiom—in the original *tiritimpiti tiritimpiti*—is based on strong onomatopoeia suggesting the sound of loud beating. Compare its similar use in “The Tuft of Wild Beet.”

82 It is unusual for the narrator to interject this kind of comment, a deliberate reference to contemporary society and politics.

“Who’s there?”

“Virgil the Sorcerer.”

“Go away, move on! There’s no place for you here.”

“But where else can I go? I’m a condemned soul.”

“Anywhere but here! We’ve got no place for you.”

And so Virgil had to stay outside, and all he could do was cry and bite his lip because Death had taken away his wand of magical power.

Now let’s leave the devils and go to Malagigi. Virgil’s fate had left him deeply distressed.

“What can I do about this?” he asked.

Well, what he did was to take Virgil’s lost soul and his bones and carry them off to an island where the ocean was broadest and deepest. There he built a tomb of stone, like a huge chest without a lid, and threw the soul and the bones into it. Then he spoke four words of magic, drew three powerful circles, and recited the following spell:

“Turn and turn, around and around,  
Let the sea and the world be unveiled;  
Let the Sun tremble, the Moon grow dark,  
And Fate wrap up the whole of it.”

Ever since he said these words, big things have been happening on that island. If someone comes to that tomb and looks at the bones, the sky clouds over, it thunders, flaming arrows rain down by the thousands, and it seems as if the universal flood is coming. As for the sea, it’s simply beyond any telling. Tempests, giant breaking waves, a hellish din—boats and large ships are swallowed as if they were little pills, and all human courage is useless: the braver you are, the more quickly you sink to the bottom and die a hideous death. That’s the kind of spell that was created.

God himself took fright, my friends! May no mother’s son ever be caught in it!

But whoever tells this, or has it told,  
No dreadful death will ever hold.<sup>83</sup>

*Told by Ninfa Lobaido to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

83 *E cu’ l’ha dittu, e cu’ l’ha fattu diri, di mala morti nun pozza muriri*, an interesting formula to close with. It suggests that the act of telling this tale is in some sense apotropaic, conferring the power to avoid the kind of terrible death described at the end.

54. THE DEVIL<sup>84</sup>

Once upon a time the devil was in his home at hell. Many men were dying and arriving there, and he went and asked, “How come you’re all coming here?”

“Because of women,” they responded.

The devil became intrigued and said, “I’d like to see what’s happening just out of curiosity.”

So he dressed himself in elegant clothes like a cavalier and went to Palermo. Once he was there, he passed by a window, saw a woman, and took a liking to her. He walked by many times, and his liking for the woman grew. So he asked her to be his wife with the condition that she would not have to pay a dowry to him. Only during the engagement could she ask him for anything she might need.

“And pay attention,” he said. “After the marriage you won’t be allowed to ask for anything.”

The woman consented, and he gave her everything she needed. Then they were married, and soon thereafter he took her to the theater. While they were there—and you know how women are!—she began to regard the clothes of the other women. There was one dress that appealed to her most of all, one that she didn’t have, and she began to desire it. And since she was not allowed to ask her husband for anything, the woman became distressed.

“Rosetta,” her husband asked her, “why are you so sad?”

“It’s nothing.”

“On the contrary. You don’t seem to be yourself.”

“Really. It’s nothing.”

“I don’t believe you. It’s better if you tell me.”

“Very well. You really want to know? I saw another woman’s dress, and I can’t have it. That’s why I’m upset.”

Upon hearing these words the devil flew into a rage.

“Ah! It’s true then that men go to hell because of you women.”

He left her abruptly and went to a friend’s house where he told him what had happened with his wife. Then he said to him: “Do you know what I’ve thought of doing? I’m going to take over the body of the King of Spain’s daughter. She’s going to become sick, and the king will issue a proclamation:

<sup>84</sup> The title of the tale in Sicilian is “Lu Diavulu Zuppidu” or in Italian “Il Diavolo Zoppo,” who is one of the devils created by the popular imagination.

*whoever can cure my daughter can have her as his wife, if he is a man, and two thousand gold coins, if she is a woman. After I take possession of her body, you'll come to cure her. When I hear your voice, I'll leave her. Then you'll marry her and become king."*

Soon thereafter the devil took possession of the body of the King of Spain's daughter, and since she could no longer speak, the king issued a proclamation: "Whoever cures my daughter can have her for his wife if he is a man, or she will receive a great reward if she is a woman."

The devil's friend arrived. The guard did not want to let him pass, but the friend knew exactly what he was doing.

"I want to go to the court," he said. "Isn't it true that whoever wants to cure the princess is allowed to enter? So let me enter."

When the king heard them arguing and learned why the man had come, he said to the guard down below, "Let him come up here immediately!"

The devil's friend climbed the stairs, and when he stood before the king, the king said to him, "How long will it take for you to cure my daughter?"

"Three days, your majesty. But you must leave me alone with your daughter locked in her room, and if you hear noise, don't worry. It will only be a sign that she is getting better."

After entering the room of the princess, the devil's friend began to speak to the devil, "All right, my pal. You can come out and set the princess free!"

The devil, who was inside the princess, responded, "What? Me? I'm doing well here. And you think that I want to leave?"

"Let's be serious, pal. Come out, or else they'll kill me!"

"Let's not even talk about this! Nothing will get me to budge from here, not even guns."

His poor friend pleaded with him like a saint and tried to convince him to leave the princess's body for fear that the three days would soon pass. On the last day, he was so upset and dejected that he went to the king and said, "Your majesty, in order to bring about the cure it's necessary to command your ships to fire their cannons with a twelve-gun salute."

The king gave the orders, and the ships fired their canons.

"What's the meaning of the twelve-gun salute?" the devil asked his friend.

"What's it all about? Well, your wife just arrived, and they're making a big fuss about it."

"My wife!" the devil exclaimed. "My wife! I'm getting out of here. I don't want her near me. I can't even stand her smell."

There was a flash of lightning, and the devil vanished. This was how the princess was set free. The devil's friend called for the king to show him that


his daughter was completely cured. The king was beside himself with joy and gave him the princess as his bride and kept him at court.

And so, from this story we can conclude that women are never content and can be the ruin of men.

May whoever told this tale or had the tale told  
never have to die a bad death whenever he gets old.

*Told by Giovanni Patuano, a blind man, to Pitirè.*

## 55. THE FAIRY PRINCESS'S MIDWIFE

nce upon a time there was a married woman who was a midwife. One day, as she was cooking in her kitchen, she saw a hand appear and heard the words, "Give me some!" So she took a plate and filled it with what she was cooking. When the hand came back and returned the plate, it was filled with gold coins.

The next day, as she was cooking, the hand appeared again: "Give me some!" She gave it a plate bigger than the first, and the same hand returned it filled with gold coins. And so it went on for nine months with the hand always doing the same thing, and the woman making the plates larger and larger until she was using a big serving platter.

When it was just one day short of a full nine months, the midwife heard a knocking on her door at night, as if someone needed her to help with a birth. But when she got dressed and went downstairs, she found two giants standing in her doorway. They blindfolded her, tossed her up on their shoulders, and ran off with her. She couldn't see who they were or where they were taking her. Soon they entered a doorway, took off her blindfold, and led her upstairs. Entering a bedroom, she saw a very pregnant lady, who addressed her saying, "Good woman, it's you I want as my midwife."

So the midwife stayed with her and didn't budge. After two weeks passed and her husband had no idea where she was, the poor man began to lose his mind. "What's happened? Oh my poor wife, are you still alive?" And he combed the entire city by day and night and looked for her everywhere.

Now the pregnant lady, as it turns out, was a fairy princess, and on the fifteenth day she gave birth to two handsome boys.

"My good woman," she said to the midwife, "you've been with me for fifteen days, and now I must ask that you stay another fifteen to take care of me."

In turn, the midwife agreed to remain fifteen days longer. At the end of the month the princess said, "My good woman, do you wish to leave now?"

"Only as your Excellency commands."

"And how do you wish to be paid, in punches or pinches?"

The midwife thought to herself: "If I say 'pinches,' my death will be slow. So it's better to say 'punches,' then at least I can die quickly." (She actually believed the princess intended to give her punches.) So she replied, "Punches."

The fairy princess called the two giants to bring a large sack of gold coins and another sack half its size. She ordered the giants to empty these by handfuls and to fill up another sack for the woman to take with her.<sup>85</sup> That night she commanded one giant to carry the woman blindfolded, the other, the sack, and they brought the woman back to her house.

Now, since her husband had found no trace of her and had decided she was dead, he had begun wearing black. When the giants knocked at his door, he thought it was his wife's soul returning and cried out, "I exorcize you, in God's name!"

"Now don't go exorcizing me! I'm your wife! Open the door!"

The husband was frightened to death but went to open the door. "It really is my wife!" he said when he saw her, and they embraced. "Where have you been? I was sure you were dead!" But when he saw the gold coins, and she recounted all that had happened, he ceased his mourning and made no more mention of these events.

Now that the midwife was so wealthy, she gave up being a midwife. She acquired carriages and fine clothes in abundance and became one of the leading ladies of Palermo. Ten years later she was at the Four Corners when a luxurious carriage came along. Looking up, she heard someone call her: "Psst, psst! Climb up here!" It was a lady calling her to come up into the carriage.

The carriage took her to a grand palace, where she was led upstairs. When she and the lady were face to face, the lady said, "Good woman, don't you remember who I am?"

"No, my lady."

"Really? Don't you remember that ten years ago you came to assist me for a whole month, and I had those two beautiful boys? And I was also the one who held out my hand and asked for food. I was part of the society of fairies, and if you hadn't been generous and given me food, that very night would have

<sup>85</sup> There has been a play on words in Sicilian all along, since the same word (*pugna*, *pugnè*) can mean "punches," "fists," or "handfuls."

been your last. But because you were generous, we made you rich. Now I have left that society, and I live here with my two sons.”

The midwife looked at her in astonishment. She blessed the moment when she had obeyed her generous impulse. And the two of them became friends for ever after.

And so they remained content and at peace,  
While we have to sit here, grinding our teeth.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 56. THE SERPENT

Once upon a time there was a husband and wife who had three children, all girls: one was six years old, the other four, and the youngest, two. They were sent to learn lessons from a teacher who was unmarried. While the young girls grew up, their mother fell sick because of a deadly disease. She knew the Lord was calling her to Him, but before she died, she turned to her husband and said, “I’m dying, and I want you to remarry. See the pair of shoes over there. Well, when they fall to pieces, you are to remarry.”

She died, and nobody spoke about this any more. The father remained alone with his daughters. But when the teacher saw that the girls’ mother had died, she began to give them many caresses. After a few days had passed, she said to the eldest daughter, “Rosina, you really love me, don’t you? If you really love me, tell your father to marry me so that I can become your mother.”

“I love you, my lady, very much,” replied the girl. “But my mother said before she died that my father should only re-marry when some shoes fell to pieces.”

“Foolish girl!” the teacher said. “Take the shoes and soak them in water. Then hang them up, and you’ll see that they’ll become rotten very soon. Then I’ll become your mother!”

The girl believed this and told her sisters. So they climbed a ladder, took the shoes, and soaked them in water. It didn’t take long for things to take their course. The shoes became rotten and fell to pieces.

When the eldest daughter saw what happened, she said, “Papa, now that the shoes have fallen to pieces, why don’t you marry the teacher? She’s single. Why don’t you look her over?”

The father pretended not to listen, but he did. He sent word to the teacher, and in a short time they were married.

Let's leave them for now and turn to a king and queen. This queen was pregnant, and after nine months, the labor pains began, and the king immediately ordered a midwife to come and help. But when the midwife placed her hand inside the queen and took it out, there was no hand. The king called for another midwife, but when she put her hand inside and withdrew it, her hand was missing. The same thing also happened to the third midwife. So a proclamation was issued: "Whoever comes to help the queen will be richly rewarded!"

But who would want to come?!

By this time the three girls of the stepmother were grown up, so when the stepmother heard this, she called the king's messenger and told him to take the eldest daughter.

"This girl is a midwife," she said. "She can help the queen give birth!"

The maiden felt more dead than alive, for there was nothing she could do about this. She began to walk and weep.

"What am I going to do when I've never worked as a midwife?"

"Eh, my daughter," the king's servants cried, "you've fallen into bad hands!"

The maiden didn't know to whom she could turn, and she asked to be taken to the gravestone of her mother where she wept and asked for help. All at once the stone opened, and the mother rose from the grave.

"It's your fault, my daughter," she said. "You're paying a high price for seeking out such a stepmother. But I'll tell you what to do. As soon as you arrive at the royal palace, have a basin filled with milk, and another with water and put on an apron. Then go to the queen, stick your hand inside, and say: 'Come out, come here, my baby boy,' and when he comes out, bathe him in the water and then throw him into the basin with milk."

Poor Rosina prepared all the things that her mother had told her to do. Then she climbed the stairs of the palace and entered. As soon as she said, "Come out, my baby boy," she saw a serpent come out instead of a baby boy. She washed him with fresh water and then threw him into the basin of milk. The queen was happy to have escaped the danger and gave the maiden two hundred ounces of gold.

After Rosina returned home, the stepmother couldn't bear the sound or sight of her.

"You're not dead?" she cried out.

"And why should I have died?"

The disgraceful stepmother took the two hundred ounces of gold and continued to treat the maiden with scorn.

Now, let's return to the serpent which, after a few days, began to ask for milk. A wet nurse came, and she took him to her breast, but the serpent ate her breast, and that was that. Another wet nurse came, and the serpent suckled and ate her breast. The same thing happened to the third wet nurse, and no wet nurses were willing to come anymore. So, the king had a proclamation issued: "Whoever will come to be a wet nurse at the royal palace will be richly rewarded!"

The stepmother called to the royal messenger and said, "Take this maiden. She's got milk!" And she gave him Rosina, who was still unmarried.

The maiden went and wept on her mother's gravestone, and her mother appeared and said, "When you arrive at the palace, have them bring you a jug of milk with a tube in the form of a nipple. Place it over your breast and the nipple in the serpent's mouth. Don't be afraid!"

The maiden went to the palace, asked for the jug, and began to suckle the serpent, who put the nipple in his mouth and soon began to suck the milk. For two years Rosina led the life of a wet nurse, and at the end of this time, the serpent said in a frightening voice, "I don't want any more milk."

Rosina was given four hundred ounces of gold and returned home. As soon as the stepmother saw her, she said, "Are you back again?"

"Isn't this my home?" the maiden said. "I've brought you four hundred ounces of gold."

"What am I supposed to do with it?" the stepmother responded, but she stuck the money in her pocket.

After several years passed, the serpent wanted to marry. And since nobody outside the palace knew that he was a serpent, he got married. However, after the first wedding night, they found his wife dead. Others came to marry the prince, but no matter how many wives he took, they were all found dead the morning after the marriage. What could be done? A proclamation was issued. The stepmother called the royal messenger.

"Come here. Take her. This maiden helped the queen give birth to the prince. She suckled him. Now she should marry him!"

Poor Rosina! As soon as she was delivered into the hands of the king's servants, she asked as usual to go to her mother's gravestone.

"Oh mother, what should I do?"

Her mother appeared at the tomb and said, "This is what you should do. As soon as you arrive at the palace, marry the serpent, and then at the table give him all that you find in front of you. When it's time to go to bed, you are to tell all the ladies of the court that you don't want anyone with you when you undress. As soon as you are alone with the serpent, he'll say to you, 'Undress yourself and get into bed!' But you're not to get undressed. Instead, you're to

say, 'You undress yourself, and get into bed!' As soon as you say this, he will shed the first layer of his skin and say to you, 'Undress yourself and get into bed!' You're to respond. 'You undress yourself and get into bed!' and you'll see that he will shed his second layer of skin. Then he'll repeat it. 'Now you get undressed and get into bed,' and you say the same thing again without ever getting undressed. The seventh time, when he sheds the last skin, he'll become a handsome young man unlike any you've ever seen. Well, then you're to get into bed, and after two hours he'll ask you, 'Rosina, Rosina, what time is it?' You'll respond, 'It's the time that my father returns from the theater.' After a while, you'll hear, 'Rosina, Rosina, what time is it?' 'It's the time that my father sits down to dinner.' Then when it turns day: 'Rosina, Rosina, what time is it?' 'It's the time that my father calls for his coffee.' As soon as the sun rises, 'Rosina, Rosina, what time is it?' 'It's the time that my father calls for his breakfast.' Then the prince will embrace you and say, 'You are now my wife, but pay attention and don't tell anyone about this. Otherwise, you'll be lost!' "

With these instructions the maiden left from the church where her mother was and went to the palace where she married the serpent. At the table she gave him all that she had in front of her. That night she heard, "Get undressed."

"You get undressed!"

"What time is it?"

"It's the time that my father returns from the theater!"

"You are now my wife!"

"And you are my husband!" and that's how their exchange ended.

The next morning the maiden was very content. During the day the prince appeared as a serpent, but at night he was a handsome young man and enjoyed making love. After a few months passed, the queen mother could not understand why the princess was so happy to be with a serpent, and she got all worked up thinking about it, but she didn't say anything to the maiden.

One day the princess asked her husband to do her a favor and to appear as a man at least one time. He agreed and said, "Tomorrow sit down by the window. You'll see a cavalier pass by, and he'll greet you with a tip of his cap. This man will be your husband. But pay attention because if you breathe a word to anyone, your husband will be taken away, and you'll only be able to find me among tales and stories."

The next day, as soon as they had finished eating, the serpent disappeared. The princess went to the window and sat down next to the queen mother. A cavalier passed by, and he tipped his cap to greet the princess, and she replied by smiling. The queen suspected something, and she grabbed her by the hair and dragged her inside.

“Oh, you traitor, is this the way you respect my son just because he’s a serpent?”

No sooner did the poor daughter-in-law find herself in this difficult situation than she forgot her husband’s warning and said, “Your majesty, that man who you thought was a stranger is your son. The fairies have him in their power and have enchanted him causing him to be a serpent during the day, and at night, a man!”

But that night the serpent did not return home . . . When the maiden remembered her husband’s warning, she began to weep in grief. Then she took a little money and documents with her and departed.

After she had traveled a great deal, she arrived in a town where she saw a house for sale and turned it into an inn, and she had the following written over the door: “Three days of free lodging for anyone who can tell me stories and tales.”

Well, there were many people at the inn who came and went. And one day an old woman came and began talking. “This morning I saw a strange thing in the country side. A handsome young man came out of a crack in the mountain carrying a bundle of clothes to wash. As soon as he arrived at the river, he began to say, ‘If my wife were here, I’d have her carry these clothes to the mountain and give them to the fairies.’ ”

“Tell me,” said the princess, acting like an innkeeper, “Do you know where this place is? Could you take me there?”

“Yes, signora,” and they went into the countryside.

When they arrived at the river, the maiden cleverly took her leave from the old woman and hid behind a bush. Then her husband arrived with his bundle.

“Alas, I’ve been ruined! If my wife were here, I’d give her these clothes to carry to the mountain and give to the fairies!”

All at once his wife appeared and revealed herself. Then he told her what he had suffered and what had to be done to free him. Because she loved him so much, his wife went to the mountain and entered through the crack of the rock.

“My lady,” she said to the eldest fairy, “here are the clothes!”

“What do you want?”

“I want what you want, my lady!”

“And what should I give you?”

“Whatever your lady wishes!”

Well, they passed the entire day between “what do you want” and “whatever you want” until it became dark. By then the sisters of the fairy became filled with pity, and the youngest fairy said, “Don’t you see how much this poor girl has suffered. Give her what you should give her and let her go!”

"If this is what you want," the eldest fairy said, and then she turned to the maiden. "You may take your husband away."


You can imagine how happy the maiden was! She ran to the river, took her husband, and in the wink of an eye they were back at the inn.

The day after they departed and went to the palace. When they arrived, they told everyone about all that happened to them. The prince said that the fairies had cast a spell on him when he was still in his mother's womb, and he had remained enchanted until his wife had finally freed him. The queen mother repented for having mistreated her daughter-in-law and asked for pardon.

So they lived on happily and in peace,  
While we just sit here, picking our teeth.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 57. CHILD MARGARITA

nce upon a time there was a merchant with a wife and three daughters. The oldest was extraordinarily beautiful so that people called her "Child Margarita."

When the children reached the proper age, they began school. Their teacher was a young woman and began doing them special favors. After some time, the girls' mother died. Then the teacher, who had plans of her own, began doing them even more favors than before. One day she said to Child Margarita, "Margarita, if your father plans to re-marry, he should consider marrying me."

The girl dutifully reported this to her father. And the man decided to do just that, noting that his daughters had not fared badly with this teacher. But the minute they were married, the woman felt a visceral hatred for Margarita because she thought the girl considered herself special.

One day she sent Margarita on a walk with the maid, who was instructed to abandon the child in a deserted part of the countryside. This she did, and the child, alone and afraid, began crying pitifully. Finally an old woman appeared and asked, "Why are you crying?"

"Why shouldn't I be crying? My stepmother sent me on a walk with the maid, and I got lost."

"In that case, do as I say: go to that nearby palace, and all will turn out well for you."

The girl went to the palace, entered, and found one beautiful room after another. When she called out, "Greetings!" nobody answered. She looked further and then heard someone groaning. Peering into the back of a room, she saw a poor lady lying in bed all covered with blood. The girl searched the drawers of a chest for clean linen and changed her bed sheets.

"May the good Lord reward you for this, dear girl," said the woman. Then Margarita went into the kitchen, washed the sheets, and proceeded to clean up the whole house.

Now let's return to the stepmother, who was enjoying the fact that her stepdaughter had disappeared. One day she went to her mirror and said,

"Mirror of mine, so nice and round,  
Can anyone prettier than me be found?"  
"There is the sun, and there is the moon,  
And then there is Child Margarita."  
"What? Margarita is still alive?"

"Certainly she's alive," answered the mirror, "and she's living in a palace as if she owned the place."

Meanwhile, Margarita was working every day as a servant for the poor woman with the wounds. It turns out that this woman was a condemned soul who was serving out her term of punishment. So, when the stepmother learned about this, she went to her mirror and said,

"Mirror of mine, so nice and round,  
Can anyone prettier than me be found?"  
"There is the sun, and there is the moon,  
And then there is Child Margarita."

"Oh, what must I do to rid myself of this creature?"

"Summon an old witch, give her this enchanted braid of hair, and order her to bring it to Child Margarita."

This is exactly what the stepmother did, and the old witch went off to find the child.

Now the time had arrived when the wounded woman had completed her term of suffering. She embraced Child Margarita and said, "My suffering is now over. Because of all the good you have done for me, I am leaving this entire palace to you with all its contents. But you must be very careful because your stepmother has evil designs on you."

With these words, she vanished.

One day Margarita was sitting at her window when the old woman came

along. She claimed to be her grandmother, and the girl, who had a trusting nature, invited her inside.

"How lovely you are, my child, and what lovely hair you have! Here, let me brush it for you."

The girl believed her and let her brush her hair. At the right moment the old witch inserted the enchanted braid, and Margarita fell into an enchanted sleep. The old woman, quiet as a cat, went back to her house.

A few days later the liberated soul returned and removed the braid, and Margarita was revived.

"Didn't I tell you? *Your stepmother has evil designs on you.* Be very careful now, because the next time I won't be able to come back again to revive you."

Now the stepmother went to her mirror and said,

"Mirror of mine, so nice and round,  
Can anyone prettier than me be found?"  
"There is the sun, and there is the moon,  
And then there is Child Margarita."

"What? How can she still be alive?"

"She is. But here's what you must do. Call the old woman, give her this long pin, and tell her to stick it into Margarita's head."

So that terrible old woman went there again, pretending this time to be someone in need of lodging for the night. Child Margarita welcomed her and was completely taken in by her pretenses. She let her caress her with "How lovely you are!" and the like, and finally the old woman got to touch her hair. In the twinkling of an eye the deceitful old woman had inserted the long pin, and the girl fell into an enchanted sleep. The old witch put seven veils in front of the girl's face and departed. And now the liberated soul was unable to return to free Margarita from the spell.

Now, let's leave her there, enchanted, and take up the story of a prince who liked to go hunting. On one of his outings he encountered a dreadful storm, and where did he find shelter? In the very palace where Margarita lay sleeping. When he entered and saw the girl he said, "Oh, what a rare and lovely face! Could she be embalmed?" and he touched her head. As he stroked her hair, he noticed the pin and pulled it out. All at once she awakened and was startled to find herself alone with a man.

"Don't be afraid," he said, "I am a prince and will do you no harm. But tell me, how is it you've come to be here alone?"

After she told him the whole story, the prince said, "Oh my poor girl! But take courage now because I am with you."

Things followed their usual course, ending up with "Do you love me?"

“Yes, and do you love me too?” So they hugged and kissed, and the prince left for home, leaving her safely shut within her palace.

When he got home, he told the whole story to his mother, who said, “Well, let’s go see her first, and then we can discuss it.”

They went together, and when the queen saw the maiden, she said, “My son, no need to discuss it further, this is the wife for you.”

So the wedding was arranged, carriages were summoned, and off they went.

Meanwhile the stepmother picked up her mirror and said,

“Mirror of mine, so nice and round,  
Can anyone prettier than me be found?”  
“There is the sun, and there is the moon,  
And then there is Child Margarita.”

“But how can this girl still be alive?”

“She is, and there’s nothing you can do about it. She’s marrying a prince, and you can whistle all you want.”

When she heard this, the stepmother went into a frenzy and smashed her head against the wall until it split open.

Once the prince and Margarita were married, she said to him, “If you truly love me you’ll do me a great favor. My sisters are suffering terribly because they are in the hands of our dreadful stepmother.” (Indeed, she was unaware that the stepmother had already split her head open.) “Send for them to come and live with us here.”

The prince sent for them and provided rooms for them in his palace, and they all lived like princesses.

So they lived on, in contentment and peace,  
While we just sit here, picking our teeth.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 58. SUN, PEARL, AND MOON

Gentlemen, there was once a king and a queen who longed to have children, either a son or daughter, because they didn’t have any. At a certain point, the Lord took pity on them, and the queen became pregnant. During those times there were astrologers. So they called an astrologer, and the king said to him, “What can you tell me about the queen?”

After examining the queen, the astrologer declared, "The queen will have a daughter, but . . ."

And he stopped with "but." So the king said, "What's the meaning of this *but*?"

"Your majesty, when your daughter turns thirteen and touches a spindle, she will be cast under a spell."

Upon hearing this, the king said, "Quick! I want a house built beneath the ground."

Meanwhile the queen began preparations for giving birth, for the time had come. Indeed, she brought forth a beautiful daughter, and you can just imagine the happiness in the palace! Soon afterward they called for a wet-nurse and sent her with the baby beneath the earth so that they could see neither the sky nor the ground above. In short, the little girl grew up in another world, not seeing anything at all. She was seven<sup>86</sup> when, one day, it seemed to the nurse that the girl was sleeping, and she said to herself: "I'd like to entertain myself a bit."

Thinking that the girl was in a deep sleep, she took a spindle and began spinning. But what did she do? Well, she soon had a desire to drink a glass of water in another room. So she put the spindle and the distaff on top of a chair and went off. Well, guess who woke up? The girl, of course. She got up from the bed, saw the spindle, and it seemed such a new thing that she took it into her hand, and all at once she was enchanted.

Now let's return to the nurse. When she returned, she saw the enchanted girl, who seemed as if she were dead.

"My girl! My girl! What am I going to do?" She began to cry out. Her screams were heard above the ground causing the king and queen to descend. When they saw their daughter, she seemed dead to them. The king burst into tears and immediately took the girl and had three dresses made for her, one more beautiful than the other, and then he had her dressed in them one on top of the other.

"These are the dresses that I would have made for your wedding, my daughter!"

And he ordered her to be brought to a small cottage in the country where he had a beautiful coffin built for her. Then he had her sealed in the cottage, which was not to be opened.

Now, years later, there was a prince who was out hunting, and it started to rain very hard. The poor man could not find shelter and ran toward the

86 The storyteller seems to have forgotten that the unlucky year is supposed to be the thirteenth year.

cottage. At that time there was a ladder of silk on the side of the cottage, and once he arrived there, he had his valet climb the ladder. After the valet reached the balcony, he opened the windows to a room and saw a beautiful maiden, just as beautiful as the sun (for the girl of seven had continued to grow). The valet went back down the ladder and said to the king, "Your majesty, what a beautiful catch we've made!"

They went inside together, and the prince climbed the stairs and saw the beautiful creature just as she was—alive and breathing with a rosy complexion and the spindle in her hand. In all the confusion no one had ever thought of taking away the spindle. The prince approached her, looked at her, and said, "Oh! My daughter, I pity you . . . What's that you have in your hands?"

As soon as he took the spindle from her hands, the maiden was revived. But she was afraid, and he said to her, "Don't be afraid. You've found a father, a brother."

He gave her something to eat, restored her health and everything. Then he said to her, "I've got to go now, but you can count on my returning here tomorrow."

So he went back home with his valet, and the prince's mother said to him, "How come you're so late?"

"Mother," he said, "I really enjoyed the hunting today."

The next day they returned to the hunt, and he went to the maiden's cottage. Her name was Anna.

"How are you, Anna?"

"Very well. And you, prince?"

"I'm fine."

To be brief, by the end of nine months the maiden became very pregnant. She gave birth to a handsome baby boy and named him Sun.

Now let's turn to the old queen who worried about her son because he was rarely at the palace anymore, and she wondered what he was doing. Indeed, the queen racked her brains seeking to know where her son was spending his time, and since she couldn't discover anything, she said to him, "You've got to tell me whether you're spending your time with some maiden."

And without knowing her, the queen felt a great anger toward poor Anna. The poor prince went and enjoyed his time with Sun and was crazy about him. In the meantime, as the boy grew, Anna became pregnant again. In nine months she gave birth to a baby girl and named her Pearl.

In the meantime, the old queen continued to suspect something and would say, "My son, you're doing something deceitful! What's going on in your head? . . . The entire realm is falling to pieces. . . ."

Now it so happened that the prince became sick and had to stay in bed. His mother was afraid that he might die. Clearly he became sick because he missed being with Anna! The poor prince secretly wrote a letter to her and told her not to worry about him because his sickness was nothing, and he wanted to know how the children were because he was thinking about them.

But he went from bad to worse and was overcome by fever. In his delirium he said, "Sun, Pearl, and Anna, you've taken my heart and soul."

When his mother heard this, she said, "Ahh! That whore has destroyed my son!" And after she uttered many insults, she said, "Be quiet, my son, because tonight I'm going to have you eat with Sun!"

Meanwhile, she called her son's faithful servant, the valet, and said to him, "Tell me the truth, or I'll cut off your head. What's the matter with my son?"

She was so furious with the valet that his legs trembled, and he told her everything from the beginning to the end,

"Ahh! That wicked woman!" the queen said. "Wait till I get my hands on her! Well, I want you to bring me Sun, and if his mother doesn't want to give him to you, tell her that my son wants to see him."

On official orders, the valet went to the prince's wife, and Anna asked, "How is the prince?"

"Better," the valet responded, "but today he wants to see Sun."

The mother took Sun, dressed him nicely, washed him, and gave him to the valet.

"Make sure to take care of him. Is there a risk of some treachery?"

The poor maiden's heart was speaking to her. And the valet departed, and when the old queen saw the spitting image of her son, she said to the boy, "Ahh! You're wicked, more wicked than your father!"

She took the boy by the arm and said to the cook, "Take him and slaughter him. Then I want you to cook him for me."

Instead of killing the boy, the cook took him to his home and hid him. Then he made a dish of meat to please the queen. At noon he carried it to her.

"This is Sun."

"Ahh come! Come here. I'm going to have you eat with your father who's made me suffer and almost die from the pain."

Then she went to her son with the dish and said, "Take this, my son. Eat this here. It's Sun."

The next day the vile queen said to the valet, "Now you've got to bring me Pearl so that I can have her eat with her father."

The valet went to the princess, who asked him, "How is my son doing?"

"Very well."

"And my husband?"

“Better, but he wants Pearl so that they can eat together.”

The princess asked him, “Is there a risk of some treachery?”

It was as if her heart were speaking to the poor princess.

“What kind of treachery could there be?” the valet responded.

She dressed the little girl. The valet took her away in a coach, and after they arrived at the palace, the old queen said, “Ahh! You’re more wicked than your father, and now I’ll show you how to amuse yourself.”

She called the cook,

“Take this little girl, and prepare her for me.”

The cook took the little girl, hid her, and made a dish of meat that pleased the queen. She took it to her son who continued to be delirious because of the fever.

“Here,” she said. “This is Pearl. Eat with Pearl, and tomorrow I’ll have you eat with Anna.”

The next day she said to the valet, “Tell the princess that the prince is much better and wants to see her at the palace.”

The valet departed and said to the princess, “The queen wants your majesty at the palace. They are all well. The prince is almost better and would like you to be there to enjoy some peace and quiet.”

The princess dressed herself with what she had. She still had the three dresses that her father had put on her, and she got into the coach. The old queen was at the window and kept looking at the road. When Anna appeared, the queen went out and approached her. As soon the queen was next to her, she grabbed Anna and dragged her by the hair, insulting her and accusing Anna of being a loose woman. Yelling and bawling, she took her into the palace and forced her into a room where there was a kettle of boiling oil. She brought her to the kettle and said, “Get undressed!”

Anna took off the first dress and cried out in distress, “Sun!” The dress clattered and sounded like church bells. The prince heard the great tumult and began to listen more attentively. Anna took off the other dress and cried out even more loudly, “Pearl!” and the dress clattered again

“Ahh!” the prince said. “That sounds like Anna crying out for our children!”

While the old queen made Anna take off the third dress, the prince got up deliriously and crawled on all fours to see what was happening. Anna took off the third dress and screamed in fright, “Anna!” The prince crawled on all fours into the room and found his mother who had grabbed hold of Anna and was about to shove her into the kettle. He could not believe his eyes, the poor prince!

He seized the queen from behind and threw her into the kettle. Then he

embraced Anna and kissed her. When they searched for their children, the cook delivered them safe and sound and full of life. Little by little they made preparations for a wedding and were soon married. The cook received great compliments, and

They remained happy and in peace  
While we sit here picking our teeth.

*Told by Rosalia Varrica in Palermo.*

## 59. BIANCUCIURI'S DAUGHTER

**H**ere's a tale that people have told time and again. Once there were two sisters, one rich and one poor, and each of them had a very young daughter. One day the rich one called the poor one over to help her bake some bread.

When the bread was ready, she took two tiny loaves, gave one to her daughter and one to her niece, and said, "Take these, and go fill up this little jug with water from the fountain."

While they were at the fountain, along came an old woman.

"You," she said, addressing the rich sister's child, "would you give me your bread?"

"Are you serious?" answered the girl.

"You then, would you give me yours?" she said to the poor sister's child.

"Of course, please take it."

The old woman took the loaf and was very pleased. Then she said to her, "May you grow more beautiful than the sun, and when you comb your hair, diamonds, precious stones, gold, silver, and grains of wheat will fall upon the ground. And as for you," turning to the other girl, "may you grow ugly as the plague with a pockmarked face as if birds had pecked at it, and when you comb your hair, lice, nits, and snakes will fall from it."

And so the two girls returned to their own homes and went to bed.

The next morning the poor sister went to comb her daughter's hair.

"Oh, what a gift from God! What richness is here!" she exclaimed as she saw diamonds, gold, silver, and grains of wheat falling from her hair.

Meanwhile the rich sister was combing her own daughter's hair.

"Oh, what a curse from God! All these snakes will be the death of me! How could this happen?" And she set about cleaning them all off her.

A few days later, the poor sister sent her daughter to the rich one to borrow

a sieve. "Now be on your guard," she said, "and don't breathe a word to your aunt about what I need it for. If she asks, say that I need to sift some ashes."

The daughter followed these instructions. But the aunt, who was a great snoop, kept pestering her with questions—"Just tell me," "Oh do tell me," "You know you can trust me,"—until at last the girl said, "Well auntie, it's just that we need to separate the grains of wheat from the precious stones and the gold."

"And how is it that you have such wealth?"

"Well, this is the way it happened . . ."

And she told her aunt the whole story.

"So," the rich sister thought to herself, "so this is the cause of my daughter's becoming so ugly and shedding lice and snakes, while you grow more beautiful and have jewels and gold. All right, my dearie, wait and see if I don't find a way to punish you and that old hag that did this to us!"

Some time passed, and the poor sister—no longer really poor, of course, with all that wealth—summoned her little boy (she had a son as well as a daughter). "Take all these diamonds and precious stones," she said, "and sell them at the king's palace because we need the money."

So the little boy—let's call him Jachinu—did exactly as his mother asked. At the palace, the king called him in and asked him,

"How is it, my boy, that you come to possess such wealth, much more than even I have?"

"Well, your majesty, this is the way it happened . . ." and he told him the whole story.

"In that case," answered the king, "I need to meet your sister because, if what you tell me is true, she is the very woman I should marry and make my queen."

The very next day the king commanded a horse-drawn carriage and called out, "Onwards, to the house of Biancuciuri's<sup>87</sup> daughter!"

"Oh this maiden is more beautiful than the sun!" he exclaimed once he saw her. "And what riches are falling from her hair! She is certainly meant to be my wife, even though she was born a poor commoner. As they say, 'It's the king that makes the queen.'"

He gave her a ring and said to his staff, "Dress her up as befits a queen. Have a pile of gowns and mantillas sewn for her, and have her come to my palace as soon as I send an emissary to fetch her."

87 The name Biancuciuri means "white flower." Although it appears in the story's title, its late mention here as the mother's name seems like an afterthought of the storyteller. The same delay occurs with the names of the heroine's brother, Jachinu, and of the heroine herself, Catarina.

Saying this, he returned to his palace, scattering handfuls of doubloons to the people along the way.<sup>88</sup>

Well, you can imagine how happy this made Catarina's mother (for Catarina was this girl's name). "My daughter's fortune is made!" she went around declaring joyously. But her sister was inwardly furious. Indeed, her innards were stewing with hatred, and her mind was plotting evil schemes against her niece.

She soon found her opportunity, because Catarina's mother happened to die soon after. Therefore, when the king's emissary came to get Catarina, it was the aunt's duty to accompany her. She also took along her own daughter and had no choice but to bring Jachinu as well. When they reached a point overlooking the sea, she took the ring off Catarina's finger and *zoom!*—she threw her into the deep sea. The boy Jachinu saw all this, but being frightened that she would do the same to him, he pretended to be asleep. The woman then put the ring on her own daughter's finger and brought her to the king.

"Oh my, how different she looks!" exclaimed the king.

"It must have been the sea air, your majesty. But just wait, in a little while she'll be herself again."

Let's return to Catarina, who was sinking in the sea. As she sank, the Siren of the Sea rescued her and brought her to her grotto.

"Look at all the treasure I have here," she said. "It is all for you to use. When there are no people around, we'll rise to the surface and enjoy ourselves. But when people come, the sea will open up for us, and we'll plunge to the bottom."

Now let's turn to Jachinu, who had been put in charge of the geese at the seaside. The poor lad could do nothing but weep for his sister, all day and all night. Finally the fairies came to him and said,

"Stop crying, Jachinu. We can show you where your sister lives, and you can converse with her every day. It's the Siren of the Sea who has her. When you come to the seaside, just sing this song:

'O Siren, Siren of the Sea,  
Bring my sister back to me.  
May the angels sing, the birds go to sleep,  
May my sister hear me, and rise from the deep.'<sup>89</sup>

88 Pitrè notes that this was in fact the custom of the noble families of Sicily.

89 Ah Sirena di lu mari,  
Bellu pisci mi fa' fari,  
Com' àncilu canti, e l'accedi addirmisci,  
Mannami a mè soru ca m'abbidisci!

And soon you'll see your sister come."

Jachinu did exactly as he was told. He went to the shore and sang the fairies' song, and Catarina heard him.

"O Mamma Sirena, will you send me to my brother?"

The Siren released her from the seven-link chain that bound her and sent her forth with these words:

"You may speak with your brother, but return here at once. I'll be waiting for you."

Catarina found her brother, and as they embraced and kissed, they cried out to each other, "Oh my dear little brother!" and "Oh dearest sister of mine!"

After they had spent some time together, she shook out her hair, and there was a cascade of diamonds, gold, silver and grain. The geese that Jachinu was tending gobbled them all greedily until their stomachs were ready to burst.

When they returned to the palace, the geese began singing this song:

"Cò, Cò, Cò, from the seashore we come,  
All stuffed with precious gems,  
From the daughter of Biancuciuri,  
Who outshines the sun in beauty.  
Cò, Cò, Cò."<sup>90</sup>

The palace staff looked at them dumbfounded. "Listen, listen to the song they're singing!" And the geese kept repeating the same song every day. The king, for his part, was happy to see his geese so nice and plump. But when they told him what song the geese were singing, he cried, "What? What's this I hear? I must know what's going on here!" and he sent for Jachinu.

"I must know what this is all about! Tell me what kind of droppings the geese are leaving."

"Your majesty, their droppings are gold, silver, grain and diamonds." And he told him the whole story.

"Ah, I see, this one is my real wife! Well, Jachinu, here's what you must do. Since your sister can't get free of her chain, find out what is needed to release her. Tell her to get on good terms with the Siren and wheedle the truth out of her."

90 Cò, Cò, Cò, di mari vinemu,  
Di petri domanti sàzii semu  
Di la figghia di Biancuciuri,  
Ch'è cchiù bella di lu Suli.  
Cò, Cò, Cò.

So the next morning Jachinu went to the shore as usual, summoned his sister, and told her the king's plan.

"I'll do it," she said.

After she returned to the Siren, she began combing her hair, stroking her fondly, and using sweet words to flatter her. She talked about this, that, and the other thing, and then she added,

"Oh Mamma Sirena, I know how much you love me. But if something terrible should happen to you, what would become of me then? The fish would surely eat me. Is there some way I could get free and save myself?"

"Oh my daughter, what you need are seven huge iron hammers that strike seven blows at once. They would have to be made by seven master smiths who are brothers, and made all on the same day. That would break all the seven links of your chain."

Catarina recounted all of this to her brother, who then returned to the king.

"Well, what did you learn?"

"Majesty, this is what you need to do." And he told him everything.

Well, everything was prepared exactly as needed. Jachinu called his sister, the seven master smiths swung their seven hammers, and the chain was broken. The king lifted Catarina onto the saddle of his horse, and they raced to the palace. The Siren heard the sound of the chain shattering and was beside herself.

"Oh, I've lost her, I've lost her!"

Meanwhile the king ordered the ugly daughter—his false wife—to be killed. Then he had her body salted and packed in a barrel used for tuna with her head and hands, including the ring, at the bottom. Then he sent the barrel to his mother-in-law.

"Here, this tuna is a gift from your son-in-law."

Now the woman's cat approached and said, "Meow, meow, give me a little taste, and I'll tell you all about it. Meow, meow, give me a little taste, and I'll tell you all about it."

"What are you asking?" the woman said. "This is a present from my son-in-law, just for me."

Every day she ate more of it, and each time the cat would say,

"Meow, meow, give me a little taste, and I'll tell you all about it."

When the woman got to the bottom, she cried,

"I've been deceived! This was my own daughter I've been eating! Oh, my daughter, my poor daughter!"

"I tried to tell you," said the cat. "Why didn't you give me any? Now you can live with the consequences."

Jachinu was made a general, the king and queen lived on ever after, happy and content, while we remain here without a cent.

*Told by Ninfa Lobaido to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 60. CICIRUNI

Once upon a time there was a merchant, who was married and had two children, a son named Ciciruni, and a daughter as beautiful as the sun itself. It happened that the merchant's wife died, and he re-married. But this woman was enormously jealous of her stepdaughter's exceptional beauty and did everything possible to make her life miserable.

The girl's brother finally couldn't stand seeing this. So, he left home and found service with the king, who took a great liking to him and made him his personal servant.

Ciciruni always carried a portrait of his sister with him, and whenever he had spare time, he would take it out and look at it, and give it kisses. Because the king was so fond of Ciciruni, the rest of the king's staff grew envious of him, and they were always looking for some way to get rid of him. So one of them went to the king and told him that Ciciruni never did any work, but always spent his time staring at a picture he kept. Curiosity gnawed at the king until finally he asked to see the picture.

"Whose lovely portrait is this, Ciciruni? It must be your girl friend."

"Oh no, your Majesty, this is my sister."

"Your sister? You have a sister this beautiful? You must let me see her!"

And so Ciciruni went home, got his sister, and brought her to the king. When the stepmother heard that the king wanted to see the girl, her jealousy knew no bounds. But she hid her true feelings.

Ciciruni and his sister left together, and when evening fell, they had reached a deserted countryside, where a group of fairies met them, and one of them had a ring to give to Ciciruni's sister.

"Here, my child, take this ring. It will serve you well when you are in need."

They finally came to live in the palace, and the king became so smitten with the young woman's beauty that he decided to make her his wife. Soon the marriage ceremony was completed, and they were a royal couple.

Now, let's leave them in their happiness and turn back to the stepmother,

who had a daughter of her own, ugly as sin.<sup>91</sup> The fact that the king had chosen her stepdaughter was now consuming her with such envy that she could not sleep, and she finally decided to take her daughter to the palace. On the way there she said to her, "If your sister should ask you to visit for a while, you're not to refuse! You must stay with her, and do the following. At night, when you hear that she is sleeping soundly, lift her out of bed and throw her into the sea. Then take her place in the bed and pretend you are her. That way you can be the queen."

"I'll do just as you say, mother," answered her daughter. "Leave it to me."

They reached the royal palace and presented themselves to the young queen. The stepmother greeted her in the friendliest manner, hugging and kissing her repeatedly, and covering her with caresses.

"Would you like to stay here with me for a while?" the young queen asked her stepsister.

"Yes, I'd be happy to."

So she stayed, and her sister had a fine room prepared for her quite close to her own.

Meanwhile, Ciciruni had attained a high position at the palace because he was the queen's brother. But you can imagine the envy he aroused among the other members of the court! The day came when one of these jealous people made a plan with the stepsister to throw the queen into the sea. The very next night they took the queen, very, very quietly, shut her in a box, and threw her into the sea. Then the stepmother's daughter quietly slipped into the queen's bed and pretended to be sleeping. It so happened that the king felt the urge to join the queen in her bed (persons of this rank, you understand, have separate beds).<sup>92</sup> When he saw how ugly she was, he was taken aback; but then he convinced himself that it was due to her recently being married.

This new queen had been well instructed by her mother, and she began making negative remarks about Ciciruni. One day a member of the court told the king, "Do you know, your Majesty, that Ciciruni claims that in a single night he can create a vast garden in front of your palace?"

"It's true," added the false queen, "I heard him say so myself."

The king, who was a bit naïve, believed them, and he called for Ciciruni.

"So, you've been bragging that in a single night you can create a huge garden in front of my palace? Well, let's see you do it tonight. If you fail, I'll have your head cut off!"

91 Literally, "as ugly as the stabbings of a knife." The Sicilian reads: *lādia quantu li botti di lu cuteddu*.

92 Pitre's note points out that among common folk, husband and wife always shared a large "matrimonial" bed, an essential part of the household.

"I never said any such thing, your Majesty!

"Yes, you did," said the king.

"No I didn't," said Ciciruni, but it was clear that the poor fellow had to keep quiet and leave.

"Oh poor me, what shall I do?" He was crying like a baby and went down to the seaside and called out, "Oh, my dear sister! Oh, sister of mine!"

And his sister appeared, more beautiful than words can describe. She had been adopted by a siren of the sea, who had bound her with a chain.

"Why are you crying, dear little brother?"

"Why shouldn't I? The king has ordered me to make a huge garden in front of his palace in a single night. How could I ever do this?"

"Is that why you're crying? Just tell him yes, and I'll do it for you."

And then, chained though she was, she took out the ring the fairies gave her.

"Mistress, command me!" said the ring.

"I command that tonight a vast garden be created in front of the king's palace."

No sooner said than done. That night the open field grew dark, and in the morning a vast garden was in its place, filled with such trees and flowers as no one had ever seen before.

The king looked out his window and said, "How beautiful! Congratulations, Ciciruni!"

The very next day it began again.

"Your Majesty, do you know what Ciciruni is saying? In a single night he can make a beautiful fountain in the middle of your garden."

"It's true," added the false queen. "I heard him say so myself."

This provoked the king into summoning Ciciruni again.

"So, you claim that in a single night you can make a beautiful fountain in the middle of my garden."

"I know nothing about this."

"Whether you know about it or not doesn't matter. Tonight you're going to make a beautiful fountain there, or lose your head!"

Ciciruni went again to the seashore, crying, "Oh, my dear sister!"

"What's your problem?" asked his sister.

"My problem is that the king now wants a beautiful fountain made in the middle of his garden, all in one night. It seems the garden wasn't enough for him."

"Is that why you're crying? Just tell him yes, and I'll do it for you."

That night she took out the ring.

"Mistress, command me!"

"I command that tonight a beautiful fountain be created right in the middle of the king's garden."

No sooner said than done. The next morning a beautiful fountain appeared. The king looked out, saw it, and was delighted.

"Congratulations, Ciciruni!"

Now envy really began to gnaw at the innards of Ciciruni's enemies. So the following day they said, "Do you know, your Majesty, what Ciciruni is claiming? That in one night he can bring into your garden all types of birds, in all kinds of colors."

"It's true," added the false queen. "I heard him say so myself."

The king summoned Ciciruni and asked him if this was true. Ciciruni swore over and over that he had said no such thing, but the king refused to believe him and said, "No, since you said it, now you have to do it. Tomorrow I expect to see all types of birds, in all kinds of colors, or you'll lose your head."

Ciciruni went one more time to the seashore, saying, "Oh, my dear sister! Oh, sister of mine!"

And his sister appeared.

"My brother, what is troubling you?"

"What's troubling me is that now the king wants me to gather all types of birds in his garden, birds of all kinds of colors—and all in one night."

"Fine, don't upset yourself. I can take care of it," she responded as she took her ring.

"Mistress, command me!"

"I command that you bring all types of birds with all kinds of colors to this garden tonight!"

No sooner said than done. The next morning the king woke up to a great twittering of birds. He looked out his window and saw a beautiful sight that he never could have imagined.

"Oh, what a wonder to behold! This Ciciruni is surely an exceptional fellow!"

Well, you can imagine how the false queen and the envious members of the court felt! The envy was simply eating the eyes out of their heads. At a loss for grounds to attack him, they began saying that Ciciruni was bragging that in the palace he was more important than the king himself. The false queen always had the king's ear, and she added, "Yes, this is true, I've heard him say this myself."

"Is that so?" said the king. "Well, I'll show this braggart how important he is compared to me! Have him brought here at once!"

When Ciciruni arrived, the king had him stand there while he gave him a thorough tongue-lashing. Then he ended up with this pronouncement:

"Enough for today! Get out of here and not another word from you! From now on, you'll live in the hen house, and your job will be to tend the geese. And you'd better watch yourself. If you lose one goose, you're done for!"

So Ciciruni left the palace and began tending the geese. As he led them down to the seashore, he began to cry: "Oh, my dear sister!"

And his sister appeared.

"Look what's become of me," he said. "The king has reduced me to tending geese."

"Don't worry, I'll take care of it," she said as she began stroking her hair, which was like slender threads of gold. And what do you imagine happened? From one of her golden braids dropped barley and grain, and from another dropped precious stones and diamonds. The geese began to eat and continually gobbled until they managed to eat up everything.

Then Ciciruni took leave of his sister and led the geese back to the palace. As the geese approached the palace, they began singing:

"From the seaside we've come,  
And we've eaten till we're done.  
From Ciciruni's sister we've come,  
Who's more beautiful than the sun."

Now, everyone could hear this song, and of course the king heard it too.

"What could this mean?" he asked. "I must find out what's at the bottom of this." And so he began to spy on Ciciruni. One day he decided to exchange his royal garments for ordinary clothes, and when Ciciruni led the geese to the seashore, the king followed him very stealthily and saw him stop at the seashore and call out, "Oh, my dear sister, my dear sister!"

Then his sister appeared, wearing her usual chains.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Do you see, they've reduced me to tending geese."

The king, for his part, saw how wonderful her face was, and that barley and wheat dropped from one of her tresses while precious stones and diamonds dropped from the other.

"Oh, what a wonderful face she has!" he said to himself. "She looks so much like Ciciruni's sister on the day that I married her!"

He decided to go back to the palace and wait for Ciciruni. When Ciciruni arrived, the geese were with him and were singing:

"From the seaside we've come,  
And we've eaten till we're done.  
From Ciciruni's sister we've come,  
Who's more beautiful than the sun."

When he heard this, the king called for Ciciruni and had him recount everything that he had done that morning. Ciciruni was too frightened to say anything but the whole truth.<sup>93</sup>

"You must go to your sister," said the king, "and ask her what it would take to free her from the Siren of the Sea."

And that's what Ciciruni did. Once his sister heard this request, she began playing up to the siren, caressing her, and hugging her tail. Then she said to her, "Ah, mother of mine, you know how much I love you. But I am curious about one thing. Do we always have to stay here?"

"Oh, yes, my daughter; but more so for me than for you. For you, there is one way out. It's next to impossible."

"Oh, what would I possibly do if I left here? Children don't leave their mothers. I was only asking out of idle curiosity."

"Well, my child, I'll tell you what it would take to get you out of here. It would take seven brothers, and they'd all have to look alike, and seven swords, one wielded by each brother. Then, as you were leaving the sea with your chain, it would require one stroke at the chain from all seven at once, and that would set you free. But this is next to impossible, my child."

The next morning Ciciruni's sister recounted all these details to her brother, so that he knew exactly what had to be done. In turn, he went to the palace and told it all to the king.

"I am sure that somewhere in this world we can find these seven brothers," the king said, and he began sending letters in all directions in the hope of locating them. It took some time, but at last the seven brothers were found. The king had them dressed identically and gave them their orders.

Off they marched, Ciciruni in front with the brothers and the king in his carriage bringing up the rear, until they came to the seashore.

"Oh my dear sister, my dear sister!" called Ciciruni, and his sister came forth from the sea with her chain. Immediately the seven brothers leapt forward, and with one united stroke of their swords they cut clean through the chain. The king ran up and seized the maiden, put her in his carriage together with Ciciruni, and back to the palace they dashed. Once they arrived there, Ciciruni's sister told the king the whole story.

Now the stepsister was to meet the fate she deserved. The king decided to convene a great banquet and invite the entire court. Once they were all eating and talking together, he posed the following question.

93 The Sicilian uses a wonderful idiom here, *cci cuntau pani pani vinu vinu*, "he told him bread bread and wine wine."

“What would be a fitting punishment for a person who harmed this young maiden?”


The stepsister was quick to answer, “A fitting punishment? Why, she should be seized and thrown out the window head first!”

Scarcely was the breath out of her mouth than the servants seized her and threw her out the window head first. As for the stepmother—since they did not realize that she was behind it all—they simply told her never to appear in the palace again.<sup>94</sup> And as for Ciciruni, he was made chief grandee of the royal court.

So they lived on, contented and happy,  
While we stay here, and our days are empty.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 61. BALDELLONE

nce upon a time there was a merchant who had four daughters and a son. The oldest was a handsome young man named Baldellone. At one point the merchant lost his great wealth, and the family was reduced to living in real miserable circumstances. After some time the merchant had to depend on charity. What could be worse? Well, the wife became pregnant. Upon seeing his parents suffer so much, Baldellone kissed them goodbye and departed for France. He was an educated young man, and when he arrived, he went to the royal palace and soon became a captain. I'll talk more about him soon.

In the meantime, the merchant's wife, reduced to even more misery, said to her husband, “You know what I think? Let's sell the dining room table (which was the only thing that remained) so we can buy things for the baby.”

Some peddlers passed by, and they called them and sold the table. Now the merchant could buy all that was necessary for the baby, and he kept two coins to pay the midwife. His wife soon began to have labor pains and gave birth to the most beautiful daughter. She was more beautiful than any baby who had ever been born. When her mother and father saw how beautiful she was, they began to weep and said, “Daughter, it grieves us to see you born into such great poverty!”

<sup>94</sup> This is an unexpected departure from the usual pattern where both figures are punished. The narrator seems aware of this anomaly, since she has to insert an explanation, somewhat awkwardly.



The girl grew by leaps and bounds, and when she was, let's say, sixteen months old, she began to walk all by herself, and as she went about, she threw herself into the middle of some straw where her father and mother slept. One day, while she was playing in the middle of the straw, she grabbed a fistful of gold coins.

"Mamma, Mamma," she cried out, "Beautiful! Beautiful!"

Her mother could not believe her eyes. She picked up some coins with her hand and slipped them into her blouse. Then she put on her shawl and went to the market Vucciria in Palermo where she bought this and that. It was a pleasure for her to do all this shopping, and at noon, there was a feast, and they ate until they filled their stomachs.

The father asked his little daughter, "Where did you find these shiny nice things?"

"Over there, papa," she responded and took him to a hole beneath the straw where there was a jar full of gold coins. He stuck his hands into the jar and took out as many coins as he could. So now, they could begin to hold up their heads in society once again, and they became as prosperous as they were before. When the young girl turned four, her father said to his wife, "Wife, I think the time has come to have the fairies cast their spells on her and bestow gifts on Peppina (for that was how they named her). After all, she is beautiful, and we have money. So who could refuse us?"

They took Peppina in a coach to Monreale near Palermo where four sisters were living. Once they were there, they gave a signal to the coachman to stop, and they descended from the coach and entered the house of the four sisters, who told them there were certain things they had to prepare and then they would appear at their house the following Sunday where everything would be done. So, the next Sunday, the sisters went to Palermo and found everything ready. They worked with their hands, kneading the flour of Majorca, and they made four beautiful pies that were sent to be baked in the oven. After a little while, the baker's wife began to smell a delicious aroma. What could she do? She took out a pie and ate it. Then she immediately made another one with ordinary flour and dirty mop water. After she added something smooth on top, she mixed this pie in with the other three. When the pies were brought back to the house, the first fairy cut out a slice of one of them and said, "I am casting a spell on you, my beautiful girl, so that whenever you comb your hair, pearls and precious stones will fall from it."

"And I," said the second fairy, "am casting a spell so you so that you will become the most beautiful girl there ever was."

The third fairy stood up and said, "And I am casting a spell so that when

you see fruit out of season and desire it, the fruit will be immediately be there for you.”

Finally, the fourth fairy stood up and said, “And I am casting a spell . . .”

But when she was cutting the pie with the knife and was saying “I am casting a spell,” some cinders that were in the pie squirted out, hit her in the eye, and momentarily blinded her.

“Ohh, it hurts! . . . Well, now I am going to curse you for the harm you’ve caused me. Whenever you see the sun, you’ll turn into a black snake.”

At that the fairies disappeared. The mother and father burst into tears and became gloomy when they realized that their daughter would never be able to see the sun anymore.

But let’s leave them and go back to Baldellone who told wild stories in France about his father’s wealth, even though he knew that his father didn’t have a penny to his name. And so everyone respected him because, in this world, people say that “whoever goes abroad can do as he pleases and turn himself into a count, duke, or marquis.”

One day, however, the king wanted to see whether it was true that Baldellone was so wealthy, and he sent a cavalier to Palermo and explained to him in detail what he was to do. The cavalier went to Palermo, searched for Baldellone’s father, and found a palace with gates, the rooms in gold sequin, and the servants and maids in magnificent array. Baldellone’s father received him as an honored guest and invited him to dine with the family, and when the sun set, Peppina came. The cavalier was enchanted by the great beauty of this maiden. He had never seen any woman her equal. When he returned to France, he told the king about everything that he had seen, and the king called Baldellone and said, “Baldellone, I want you to go home to Palermo and bring back your sister Peppina, whether she’s a virgin or not.”

Baldellone didn’t really understand anything because he knew nothing about this sister, but he departed anyway accompanied by his friend and lover.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, he had formed a relationship with her some time ago, and she wanted to go with him. When they reached Palermo, this maiden became very jealous and decided to plot against the sister and make her lose favor in the eyes of the King of France so she herself could become queen. While they were there, Baldellone spent time at his home so he could learn about everything. They told him what had happened, and he was really happy. After some days passed, Baldellone said it was time to leave home with his sister.

95 Pitrè uses the phrase *si cci avia amicatu* and refers to this woman as *l’amica*. In a footnote he comments that this is an illicit relationship. Instead of using the term friend, which is misleading, we have referred to her as “lover.”

“Farewell, papa.”

“Goodbye, my son.”

“Farewell, Peppina.”

“Farewell, mamma. Farewell, sisters.”

And they departed. In order to go to Paris, they first had to travel by sea and then by land. Baldellone made sure that Peppina was under cover and could not see a ray of the sun. Once they reached land, he put her in a covered sedan chair with his lover. But this scheming woman was enraged by the thought that Peppina would become queen when they arrived at the palace in Paris, and that she would only become a captain's wife. So she began complaining:

“Peppina, open up a little. I'm suffocating.”

“No, my sister, that would be the end of me.”

And then.

“But Peppina, I'm suffocating.”

“How can that be!”

And afterward.

“Peppina, I'm dying.”

“Well then, die, but I can't open it for you.”

“Ahh, so that's the way it is!” the woman said, and she took a pocket knife and plunged it into the cover of the sedan chair and tore it. All at once a ray of sunlight pierced Peppina, and she became a black snake. She sprung from the sedan chair and disappeared into the royal garden that was nearby.

Baldellone was mortified and said, “Ahh! What am I going to do now? The king wanted my sister? What a miserable situation!”

“Don't be afraid,” his lover said. “Just tell him I'm your sister, and that will be the end of it.”

Baldellone let himself be persuaded and did what she said. When the king saw her, he said, “Are you telling me that this woman is supposed to be the beauty without an equal? But I've already said enough—I've given the word of a king, and I must marry her.”

So he married her, and they lived together. Meanwhile, Baldellone could not find any peace of mind and constantly thought about the woman who made him lose his sister and who had abandoned him . . . He was furious beyond belief, and since the wicked woman realized this, she began plotting against him. One day she said to the king, “My lord, I'm sick and want some green figs.”

Since it was not the season for figs, he said, “And how am I to find them?”

“It's nothing. Tell Baldellone, and he'll find them.”

“Baldellone!”

“Your majesty!”

"Go and gather some figs for the queen."

"And where am I supposed to find them? They're not in season?"

"I don't know where, but figs they must be, or else I'll have you beheaded!"

Baldellone was crushed and depressed. He went down into the garden and began to weep. After a little while, his sister appeared as a snake and asked him, "What's wrong?"

"What could be wrong? The king wants me to find some figs."

"All right," she said, "let me tell you that I'm under a spell and can give you fruit out of season. Here!"

Her brother was very content. He climbed the stairs to the king and brought him the figs. Then the king gave them to the queen who was pregnant, and she devoured every single one and wouldn't have cared if they had been poisoned. After a few days she had a craving for apricots and then cherries, and Peppina sent her cherries. In her seventh month she had a craving for pears, but Peppina could not produce pears because (I forgot to mention this) the spell was for three things: figs, apricots, and cherries. Baldellone was condemned to death, and he asked to be granted one last favor—to be buried in the royal garden.

"I grant your wish," the king said.

Then he was hanged at the gallows and buried. Now the queen was content. One night, however, the gardener's wife heard a voice crying:

"Oh brother, my brother Baldellone  
buried between water cress and grass  
while your lover enjoys life with the king."

She woke the gardener.

"Did you hear that, husband?"

When they looked out the window, they saw a black snake. The next day the gardener went into the garden to make a bouquet of flowers for the king, and he found the leaves covered with pearls and precious stones because Peppina had combed her hair, and all these marvelous things fell out. When the king saw these new things with the flowers, he asked, "Where did these jewels come from?"

"Your majesty, I found them in the garden."

The following night the gardener stood watch in the garden with a gun. At midnight the same thing happened as the day before. A shadow appeared and said,

"Oh brother, my brother Baldellone  
buried between water cress and grass  
while your lover enjoys life with the king."

The gardener was frightened. He took aim with the gun and was just about to fire when the shadow said:

“Don’t shoot! I was baptized and confirmed just like you! Come closer and look at me.”

The gardener approached, and she lifted the veil that covered her face so he could see that her beauty was without equal. Then she told him everything and asked him to tell the king that she would wait for him at this spot the next night. The following morning the gardener made his usual bouquet and found pearls. His only thought was to go to the king and tell him everything. The king was astounded, and that evening he went down into the garden with the gardener. At the usual hour the shadow appeared and was completely tormented and despondent.

“Oh brother, my brother Baldellone,” she cried out.

The king approached her, and she told him everything about her past. Then she lifted her veil. The king was struck dumb with amazement. Finally, he asked her to explain what he had to do to free her from the magic spell.

“Here’s what you must do,” she said. “Tomorrow you need to depart on horseback and ride like the wind to the river Jordan. When you are near it, you are to dismount, and you’ll find four fairies bathing in the river. One has a green ribbon in the braids of her hair, the others have red, blue, and white. Take away their clothes lying on the river bank, and when they want them, don’t give them back. Only when they throw their ribbons to you and the last one cuts off a braid of her hair and throws it to you are you to give them back their clothes, and the evil spell will be lifted.”

The king didn’t need to hear any more. The next morning at the crack of dawn he left and departed from his realm. He rode and rode, and after thirty days and thirty nights, he reached the Jordan River, where he found the fairies just as Baldellone’s sister said he would. And he did everything just as she had told him to do. When he had the ribbons and the braid of hair in his hands, he said, “I’m leaving you now, but I can assure you, I repay my debts.”

After he returned to his realm, he ran straight into the garden, called the snake, touched her with the braid of hair, and she immediately became a beautiful maiden, more beautiful than he had ever seen. She attached the braid of hair on her head, and she no longer had anything to fear. Then the king called the gardener and said, “Listen now to what you have to do. Take a large ship and embark with Baldellone’s sister. Make sure you depart at night, and after a few days, I want you to return to our port and hoist a foreign flag. Then leave the rest to me.”

The gardener did as he was told and departed that very night. After three

days he turned the ship around and hoisted a flag, let's say it was English. The king was standing by the palace window with the queen and said, "Whose ship can that be? Ahh! Now I remember, it's one that belongs to my relatives. Let's go and see."

The queen, who always wanted to be the most prominent person at all events, got dressed in the wink of an eye, and both she and the king went on board the ship.

When she saw Baldellone's sister, she said to herself, "If I didn't know for sure that Baldellone's sister had become a black snake, I'd have to say that this woman is her."

They embraced and kissed each other and went on land. When they all reached the palace, the king and queen admired the rare beauty of Baldellone's sister. Then the king said to the queen, "Tell me now, if anyone ever did anything bad to this woman, what punishment would that person deserve?"

"Ahh," the queen responded, "who could ever be so wicked as to harm this jewel?"

"But what would that person deserve?"

"That person would deserve to be thrown out of this window and burned!"

"Then so be it!" the king responded immediately. "This woman is Baldellone's sister. I was supposed to marry her, and out of jealousy you made her become a black snake so you could become queen. Now you're going to pay for deceiving me and for causing the grief this poor woman has suffered! Your punishment will be exactly the same that you pronounced. Guards! Guards! I want my servants and soldiers to seize this wicked woman, throw her through the window, and burn her."

No sooner said than done. The deceitful woman was thrown from the window and burned on the ground next to the palace. Then the king asked to be pardoned by Baldellone's sister for having had her brother hanged on the gallows.

"I'd prefer to drop this subject," she said. "Instead let's go into the garden and see what can be done."

They descended into the garden, lifted the grave stone where Baldellone was buried, and saw that his body was intact. She took a little brush and rubbed an ointment on his neck, and Baldellone began to breathe, move and rub his eyes as if he were waking up. Finally he did get up. What else can I tell you? They embraced and kissed each other. The king ordered a great celebration, summoned the merchant and his wife, and married Baldellone's sister in great pomp. Indeed,

they remained happy and content  
while we still don't have a single cent.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 62. THE TWO SISTERS

I've heard tell that there were once two sisters. One fell upon bad times; the other became a duchess, who had an ugly daughter. The poor sister had three daughters who worked with their hands to earn a living. One day they could no longer pay the rent for their home, and they were forced to go and live on the street. By chance, a servant of the duchess saw them and told his mistress, who, thanks to the insistence of this good man, granted them a small room in the carriage house. In the evening the girls usually sat outside at night to work by the light of a street lamp in order to save oil for their own lantern. But their aunt, the duchess, was a tyrant and did not want to provide them with any comfort. So, at one point she extinguished the street light so that the girls had to spin in the moonlight.

One night the youngest sister decided to keep working until the moon vanished, and as she was spinning, she got up and followed the light of the moon. Suddenly, while she was walking, a storm erupted, and she had to take refuge in a large monastery, in which twelve monks were living. As soon as they saw her, they asked, "What are you doing here, my daughter?"

She told them her whole story, and then the eldest monk turned to her and said, "May you become even more beautiful than you are!"

And the second said, "When you comb yourself, may many red garnets fall from your hair!"

And the third: "When you wash yourself, may many fish and eel jump from the water!"

And the fourth: "When you speak, may roses and flowers spring from your mouth!"

And the fifth: "When you start working on something, may you finish it within seconds."

And the sixth: "May your cheeks become as rosy as apples."

Finally, they showed her the way home and said to her to turn around only when she reached the half way mark. She did as they said, and when she turned around she became more beautiful than ever. Once she reached home, her first thought was to fetch a basin and wash herself. All at once, eels and fish appeared as if they had just been caught. Her mother and sisters were

surprised, and she had to tell them everything. Then they combed her hair and gathered the precious stones and brought them to their aunt the duchess, who was astounded to see them—and she, too, wanted to hear the entire story.

When the duchess knew what had happened, she decided to try the same thing with her daughter to make her more beautiful. That evening, she had her sit on the balcony, and when the moon began to disappear, she ordered her follow it. The girl began to walk and reached the monastery of the twelve monks. As soon as they saw her, they recognized her, and the first one to speak was the eldest brother: “May you become even uglier than you are!”

And the second: “When you speak, may dirty things come out of your mouth!”

And the third: “When you comb your hair, may many snakes fall from it!”

And the fourth: “When you wash yourself, may many worms crawl out!”

With that, they sent her away.

When she returned home the duchess was happy to see her, but she became frightened when she saw that she was uglier than before! She wanted to know where she had been, and when her daughter spoke, there was such a bad smell that her mother almost died from the stench.

Let us leave the duchess and her daughter and turn to the maiden. One day while she was sitting in front of the door of the house, the king passed by, and as soon as he saw her, he fell in love with her and wanted her for his wife. He told this to her aunt, the duchess, and they were married right away.

The next day they departed for the king’s country, and they were accompanied by the duchess. When they reached a certain point, the king wanted to go ahead and make preparations for people to meet his bride. But no sooner did he leave than the duchess quickly tore out the maiden’s eyes and threw her in a cave. Then she put her daughter in her place in the carriage and continued the journey.

When they arrived in the king’s country, the king was frightened by the sight of the maiden who pretended to be his wife. When he spoke to her, he received a whiff of foul air in return. Then he turned to the duchess and asked, “What has happened?”

She tried to trick him by saying that the maiden had been cursed by a witch along the way. But the king did not believe this and ordered the two of them to be put in prison.

Now let us return to the poor unfortunate maiden who was in a cave. Fortunately, her cries for help were heard by an old man who happened to be passing by. When he approached and saw her condition, he took her home with him. Once there the maiden sent the man to sell the diamonds that came

from her hair and also to buy two baskets. When he returned, she filled them with roses and said to the old man, "I want you to go beneath the balcony of the king and cry out that you're selling roses in exchange for eyes."


The old man did as she said, and as soon as he began crying out, he was summoned by a lady who gave him an eye in exchange for the roses. The old man brought the eye to the maiden, who was enchanted, and she put back her eye. The next day the same thing happened, and in this way, the maiden regained her sight.

As you've probably guessed, the lady who made the barter for the eyes was the duchess, who tried to trick the king again once she had the flowers. She told him that the flowers were produced by her daughter. But as soon as he approached the daughter, the stench was still the same.

When the maiden regained her sight, she embroidered some cloth with her own picture and had it displayed for sale in an esplanade in front of the royal palace. The king happened to pass by, saw the portrait, and understood. Immediately he had the old man summoned to tell him who had made the embroidery. The old man told him what had happened and brought him to the maiden. The king recognized her, and after she told him what had happened, he brought her to the palace where he had the duchess and her daughter thrown into a boiling kettle. Afterward he lived happy and content with the young queen.

*Collected by Mattia Di Martino in Noto.*

## 63. MAMMA-DRAGA THE OGRESS

nce upon a time there was a mother who had a daughter called Rosetta. One day she said to her, "Rosetta, my Rosetta, take the garbage pail and throw out the trash."

So the girl took the garbage pail and went to dump the trash down a nearby well. But when she dumped it, she also let the pail fall in.

Now it was rumored that an ogress lived in this well, and so the girl called out to her saying,

"Oh ogress, Mamma-draga, please give me back my garbage pail."

"Come down yourself and get it," answered Mamma-draga.

"Oh no, you'll surely eat me!" said the girl.

"Oh no, I promise not to eat you, I swear it by the soul of my son Cola."

"And how am I supposed to get down there?"

"Just put one foot here, the other foot there, and down you'll come."

Well, the girl was afraid that her mother would beat her if she came back without the pail, so down she went.

When Mamma-draga the ogress saw her face to face, she exclaimed, "Oh my, Rosetta, how lovely you are, how lovely! Sweep my house for me."

So the girl began to sweep.

"Well, what have you uncovered in this house?"

"A bit of dirt, a bit of earth, just like any person's house."

"Now examine my head and tell me what you find on it."

The girl began to examine the ogress's head and said, "A few lice, a few nits, just like any person's head."

"Now examine this bed and tell me what you find in it."

"A few bedbugs, a few fleas, just like any person's bed."

"Rosetta, you are truly beautiful. Now a star will grow on your forehead, and it will be so dazzling that all the people will have to bow their heads when they look at you. And how lovely your hair is! Your hair will grow from your head in golden threads, and when you comb it, one side will shower down pearls and diamonds, and the other side wheat and barley!"

Then the ogress took her to a room that contained old clothing and new clothing. She picked up the stockings, which had a good pair and a shoddy pair.

"Which of these do you want?"

Rosetta said she'd take the shoddy ones.

"But I'm going to give you the good ones," said Mamma-draga.

The same thing happened with blouses and dresses: Rosetta chose the old, worn-out ones, but Mamma-draga gave her the new ones. And so it continued, until Rosetta was dressed in a completely new outfit from head to toe, so beautiful that she looked like a German doll. Then the ogress gave her a pocket full of money and sent her back up again.

When Rosetta's mother saw her, she exclaimed, "Oh, how beautiful you look! What happened to you?"

And Rosetta told her the whole story. Well, you know how things are in a neighborhood. A woman who knew Rosetta's mother began asking her questions, and the mother told her everything that had happened. Now this woman also had a daughter, a girl as ugly as the stabbings of a knife.<sup>96</sup>

"Now pay attention to your mother," she said to her daughter. "Do you see

<sup>96</sup> This strong expression is a standard feature of the language of these tales when describing a negative female character.

how many gifts Rosetta got from Mamma-draga the ogress? I want you to take our trash and dump it. But be sure to let the garbage pail fall into the well, and then ask the ogress to give it back.”

So the girl did this, and let the garbage pail fall into the well.

“Mamma-draga, Mamma-draga, give me back my garbage pail!”

“Come down yourself and get it.”

The girl didn’t have to ask a second time but climbed right down. The ogress made her sweep the house and then asked,

“Well, what have you uncovered in this house?”

“Terrible dirt and too much earth,” the girl answered. “Just like a messy person’s house.”

“Now examine my head and tell me what you find in it.”

“Dreadful lice, big fat nits, just like a messy person’s head.”

“Now make up my bed and tell me what you find on it.”

“Awful bedbugs, dreadful fleas, just like a messy person’s bed.”

“Oh what an ugly girl you are!” said Mamma-draga. “A stinking horn will grow on your forehead, and dung will shower down from your hair on one side and smelly horse-manure on the other!”

Well, you can imagine what enjoyment *that* gave to the girl!

Then the ogress took her into the room with the old clothing and the new clothing. She showed her the stockings and said, “Which of these do you want?”

“The good ones!”

“Well, I’m giving you the old ones.”

Then she showed her the blouses, and the same thing happened, and once more with the dresses. In the end, the girl came away looking like a shabbily dressed servant. Finally, the ogress dismissed her with a slap.

“Get out of here,” she ordered, and the poor girl had to climb back up.

When her mother saw her, she exclaimed, “Oh my child, what in the world happened to you?”

“It was Mamma-draga the ogress who did this.”

Well, the two women were never on good terms after that, but Rosetta’s mother became wealthy, while the other became wretched and ugly. That’s the way the good Lord punishes envious people.

*Collected from Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 64. THE DEVILS AND THE SHOEMAKER

There was once a poor shoemaker who had a big family and couldn't find any way to support his wife and children. So off he went to a different village to try to earn his bread. When he got there, he wandered about but couldn't earn a single penny. Finally a townsman asked him,

"Master shoemaker, could you put a pair of half-soles on these shoes for me?"

So he went into the man's house, and after finishing the job, he realized that it had become dark, and he said to the townsman,

"I'd like to find a house here that I can live in."

"There is a fine one available," answered the man, "and it's empty—but it has devils living in it."

"I'm not afraid of devils," answered the shoemaker.

"Well then, spend the night here, and tomorrow I'll take you to the house."

That evening the master shoemaker was given a fine bowl of minestrone, and the next morning he was paid seventeen coins for his work. Then, together they went off to rent the house for the shoemaker. The woman who owned the house said, "You can have it free of charge, but keep your eyes open because there are devils in it."

Now this shoemaker was a hunchback with a hump the size of a large basket. When he came to the house that evening, he had found a small table to use as his workbench because he had gathered many shoes to repair during the day. And so he closed the door and cheerfully began mending the shoes, whistling and singing as he worked. When midnight came, he heard a voice from the roof of the house crying out:

"Oh! I'm falling!"

"Go ahead and fall!" he answered. "That'll make two of us."

All at once, down fell a manikin and sat himself on one foot of the table.

After a few moments he heard another voice:

"Oh! I'm falling!"

"Go ahead and fall, that'll make three."

Down came another manikin and sat on another foot of the table.

"Oh! I'm falling!" cried another voice.

"Go ahead and fall, that'll make four of us."

And still another voice cried out,

"Oh! I'm falling."

"Go ahead and fall," answered the shoemaker, "that'll make five of us."

When all four manikins had fallen, they began to dance all around the house as they sang these words:

“Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.”

When the shoemaker heard this, he was delighted to join in the dance, and he chimed in with the others singing the same words. The enchanted figures, when they saw that the man was not afraid, removed the hump from his back and hung it on the wall, and before it was day, they all vanished.

The next morning, the neighbors were so eager to see if the shoemaker was still alive that it felt like a century had passed as they waited for the sun to rise. The man opened his door, looked out, and noticed that the street was packed with people. When they saw him looking fit as a fiddle and with no hump, they asked him,

“How are you feeling, good shoemaker?”

“Perfectly fine,” he replied.

“And what happened to your hump?”

“It left me during the night.”

And they all just stood there, dumbfounded.

Now there happened to be an old woman who had a hump even larger than the shoemaker’s, and she asked him,

“Would you be willing to let me stay the night there so I can lose my hump too?”

“Of course you can,” he replied.

So that night the old woman went into the shoemaker’s house with him.

“Sit down,” he said, “and when you see four manikins drop down, you have to dance just as they do and say exactly what they say.”

Well, midnight arrived, and the usual thing happened: “Oh, I’m falling!” and down dropped four little men one after the other. They immediately began their dance, singing “Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday!” But the old woman didn’t try hard enough to keep up with their song, and the manikins were disappointed with her. So what they did was take the shoemaker’s hump and attach it to the front of the old woman. Now she had two humps, one in back and one in front. When the neighbors saw her coming out of the shoemaker’s house with two humps, they all burst out laughing.

Now the third night arrived, and this time the four little men appeared with a coffin and two wax candles. They took the shoemaker and stuck him in the coffin, gave him a candle to hold in each hand and said, “Now you must make believe you’re a corpse.”

They lifted him up and carried him off to the opening of a large cave and took him inside. Once there, they pretended to quarrel with one another,

dumped the coffin on the ground, left it there, and ran off. The shoemaker got up out of the coffin, hurried outside, and took off at a run. But then he touched his head and realized that he didn't have his cap on.

"Oh! I've lost my cap!" he said and turned around. When he returned to the cave, he found what was left of the candles, lit one, and went in. After finding his cap, he saw piles of silver and gold and all kinds of coins lying nearby. After he had filled his cap, his pockets, and all that his shirt could hold, he exclaimed, "So that's why the cap was still there! The spell's been broken!"


When he got back home, he sought out the man who owned all the houses that had been abandoned because of the spell, and they were very fine houses indeed.

"I want to buy these houses," he said.

They agreed on a price, and he paid him two hundred gold coins, since he had collected two thousand such coins from the cave. Well, he furnished those houses in the very best fashion, took the remainder of the enchanted money, and lived a rich and happy life, while the rest of us here make do with nothing.

*Told by Vincenzo Midulla at Casteltermini.*

## 65. THE TWO GOOD FRIENDS

nce upon a time, so the story goes, there were two mule drivers who were good friends, but one trusted in God and the other trusted in the Devil.

One day, as they were traveling together, one said to the other,

"My friend, it's the Devil who helps people along."

"No," the other answered. "Only by trusting in God will people be helped."

They kept arguing back and forth this way, until finally the one who favored the Devil said, "All right, my friend, let's bet a mule on it."

Just at this very moment a gentleman happened to pass—he was actually the Devil in disguise—and they asked him which one of them was right.

"You're correct to say that the Devil is the true helper," the gentleman replied.

And so the poor fellow who favored God lost his mule.

Well, this happened again and again, until the poor man who trusted in

God had lost all his mules. He was so upset that he ran away into the fields, while his friend went back home.

Now, when the first man didn't return, his wife began to worry. She suspected that his friend had murdered him, and so she had the friend put in jail. Meanwhile, the man who trusted in God had kept on walking, until he finally came to a cave filled with shrubbery. Since it had grown dark, he went inside and discovered that this was the gathering place for all the devils, and the Chief Devil was going around asking each one what he had been doing. One of them told about the two friends and the mule, while another had a story to tell about the daughter of the King of Russia. He had caused a fish-bone to lodge in her throat, and since it was impossible for any doctor to remove it, she was certain to die. Doctors had been summoned from everywhere, but no one knew the remedy, which consisted of three drops of seed from the sour grape arbor at the princess's window.

"Hush!" said the Chief Devil. "The walls have eyes, and the shrubs have ears!"

Well, the good man heard these words, and the next morning he decided to dress himself like a doctor and go off to Russia. On his arrival, he found all the court doctors gathered in the princess's room, holding a meeting. When they saw him enter, they all burst out laughing. The king, however, was willing to see what this fellow could do, so he left him alone in the room with the princess. Then the good man took the three drops from the sour grape vine and dripped them down the princess's throat. Immediately she returned from death's door.

Well, you can imagine what joy the king felt! He couldn't do enough for the man. He loaded him down with gold and had him escorted back to his own country. When he reached his front door, it was night time, and his wife, who had come to believe he was dead, refused to open—she thought he was a ghost! But finally he convinced her that he was her husband, and when she saw all that gold, she didn't know what to make of it. Her husband told her the whole story, and the next day he began building them a beautiful palace.

His friend, upon seeing that he had come back with such wealth, asked him how he had managed this. So he told him the whole story of what had happened and remarked,

"Didn't I tell you, my friend, that the man who trusts in God receives his help?"

Well, that evening the other fellow decided that he, too, would go to the cave. Just as before all the devils were gathered there, and one was telling the Chief Devil all that had happened with the princess.

“See, didn’t I warn you that the walls have eyes, and the shrubs have ears? Quickly now, let’s run around and set fire to all this shrubbery!”

And so the poor fellow was burned to ashes, all because he trusted in the Devil as his helper, and because he had been so envious.

*Collected by Mattia di Martino at Noto.*

## 66. THE BLOOD SAUSAGE

Once there were three sisters, alone in the world without any father or mother, and their livelihood depended on the good will of others. One day the oldest said to the youngest, “Do you know what? You should go and buy some bread and a small piece of blood sausage.”

The young maiden did this, and on her way back she stopped at a fountain to drink, with her hands behind her. At that instant, a dog came running up and snatched the bread and sausage out of her hands. She chased the dog, and he ran into a palace that was uninhabited, but chock full of all kinds of things. Following the dog, the young maiden discovered that the palace was filled with possessions but had no owner. Among the many items she found was lots of flax, and she thought she would bring her sisters here to see everything. The dog, meanwhile, had run off.

When she got home, her sisters asked her, “Did you buy the bread and sausage?”

“Yes,” she replied, “but I don’t have them with me.”

Without waiting to hear the reason why, her sisters began to beat her. She tried to explain, but they just kept it up.

“No, listen!” she said. “A dog stole the bread and sausage. But then I found a palace! And this palace was filled with so many things . . .”

But her sisters wouldn’t listen and kept on beating her.

“Oh! Wait! Won’t you just listen to me? Since the dog went into this palace, I went into it too, and I found that it was empty. Do you understand what I’m telling you? We can all go there and get rich!”

At first the sisters would not stop beating her, but the oldest was eventually won over, and she said, “All right, we’ll all go there. But if you’re not telling the truth, we’ll kill you.”

So they all went to the palace. When they saw that big heap of flax, they were quite satisfied and decided they would spend the night there so that they could card the flax. The oldest sister began to card, and as she did so she sang:

“The flax must suffer, but there’s no other way.  
The rooster crows at the break of day;  
And all this flax I must card and weigh!”<sup>97</sup>

While she was singing this, she heard a voice from the roof saying,

“Watch out, I’m coming down!”

In a fright, she ran to her bed and got in.

“Why are you coming to bed?” her sisters asked.

“Because I heard a voice coming from the roof,” she answered.

Then the middle sister took courage and said, “I’m not afraid, I’ll go.”

When she sat down and began singing the carding song, she heard a voice from the roof saying, “Watch out, I’m throwing myself down!” As soon as she heard it, she ran and also got into the bed. Her sisters said to her, “What’s this, you’re getting in bed too?”

“Yes, I heard the voice from the roof, and I’m getting into the bed, too.”

Now it was the youngest one who took courage and went to card the wool and sing. She, too, heard the voice from the roof, saying, “Watch out, I’m throwing myself down!”

“Fine, throw yourself down, and I’ll watch you bounce!”

So the creature, at this third attempt, did throw herself down. Then she said to the young woman, “Look, I’m an ogress, and this is my palace. Everything in it is mine. Now let me tell you what you must do. Take this flax that you’ve been carding and make it into a huge ball. Then throw it and let it roll. Wherever that ball goes, follow it.”

So she made the huge ball and rolled it. Then the ogress said, “Look, it’s rolled all the way to a palace. Inside that palace is a sleeping prince. When you get there, give him a kiss.”

Well, she went there and found the prince, but she didn’t give him a kiss, and the prince kept on sleeping. Then the maiden went and sat down at the window and began spinning cotton thread. Beneath the window there was a fountain, where everyone came to get water. Among those who came was a slave girl. She looked in the fountain, saw the reflection of the young woman at the window, and mistook it for her own reflection.

“Oh, how beautiful I am!” she exclaimed. “And my mistress sends me to fetch water! I’m going to smash this pitcher!”

The next day the slave girl came back at the same time and repeated what she said and smashed the pitcher, and a third day as well. But finally she saw

97 Quantu guai pati lu linu!  
Canta gaddu e fa matinu.  
Quantu scardu e pisu lu linu!

the young woman up in the window and realized that this was the reflection she had been seeing.

"So, it wasn't me after all that was the beautiful one! And I've smashed all those good pitchers for nothing!"

Then she looked up at the girl and said, "How did you manage to get up there?"

"From that place," answered the girl, pointing to the door.

So the slave girl went upstairs and then went directly to the sleeping prince and gave him a kiss. He woke up at once and said, "You are the woman chosen to be my wife."

The prince was now ready to go and have his fiancée's gown made, but he turned to the maiden and said, "Because you refused to give me a kiss, I can't marry you. You've just thrown away your fortune."

"I realize all of that," answered the beautiful maiden. "But let me ask you one favor: when you come back, please bring me a pocket knife and a little doll. But watch out: if by chance you forget these things, you won't be able to walk any longer. Mark my words!"

Because of the wedding dress and so much else on his mind, the prince at first forgot what she had asked for. But then he remembered, and as soon as he came back, he gave the maiden the pocket knife and the little doll, shut her up in a chicken coop, and proceeded with his marriage to the slave girl.

He brought her to the abbey where all his monastic relatives were gathered, and they began giving her wedding-sweets to eat. The more she ate, the more she swelled up. Meanwhile, the maiden began recounting all her misfortunes to the doll, which lowered her head and began swelling up also. When the wedding ceremony reached the point where the prince was to take his bride, the slave girl exploded, frightening all the monks. At the same time, the little doll also exploded. When the maiden saw what had happened to her doll, she took the pocketknife and wanted to kill herself. But the prince was there, and with a kick he knocked down her door, went in, and took the maiden as his bride.

A story written, a story told,  
Now tell me yours, since my tale is old.

*Collected in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 67. THE FAIRY WHO WOULDN'T SPEAK

**H**ere's a tale told time and again, and as I tell it, my good sirs, let's please pay attention to these gentlemen here who are listening.

Once upon a time there was a king and a queen, and they had seven children, six girls and a boy. One day the boy said to his mother, the queen, "Oh Mama, as I was passing an abbey, I saw a young maiden combing her hair. She was as beautiful as the sun, with a braid this long, bright as gold. Mama, she is the woman I want to marry."

"All right, my son," said the queen, "we'll take a royal carriage and go see if this beautiful creature is really there on the terrace of that abbey."

And so they got into the carriage, and off they went.

"Knock-knock."

"Who's there?"

"We've come to see if you have a young maiden here, beautiful as the sun, with golden braids, who was out on the terrace combing her hair. We'd like to see her."

"Here, you can take the keys and look for yourself, but there's nobody here like that."

They looked and looked but couldn't find her.

"She's not here," said the queen to her son.

"I intend to come again tomorrow," said the son, "and I'll tell you then if she's here or not."

Well, the lad went again the next day and saw her once again on the terrace of the abbey, with a braid of hair as bright as gold.

"Mother, I saw her a second time."

So the mother went to the abbey and again asked for the keys, and she went searching for the maiden upstairs and downstairs, looking in every corner. The only place she hadn't looked was the kitchen. So she went and found her, resting her head on a pile of firewood.

"So this is where you are, my daughter," she said. "I've been looking everywhere for you. Do you realize that my son is madly in love with you?" And she took her by the hand and brought her back to the palace in her carriage.

At the palace, everyone loved her as soon as they saw her. But there was one problem: she was mute and couldn't speak.

"Since you won't utter a word," said the prince, "what good are you to me? I'll have to find someone else to marry."

But all the others, his mother and his sisters, loved her more than their own eyes, and they made her stay with them in the palace. Six months went by, and

because she still wouldn't speak, the prince decided to take another woman as his fiancée, and then as his bride.

Well, after the ceremony in church, they came to the celebration where people were paying them compliments and offering wedding sweets.

"Here," said the prince to one of his servants, "take these sweets to the mute maiden, the one who doesn't speak."

He did this because he still loved her.

When the servant brought her the sweets, she spoke and said to him, "Oh, my! What does that prince think he's doing? Wait just a minute while I do something."

(Yes, she spoke to the servant, even though she hadn't spoken to the prince who wanted to marry her.)

"Did you ever see this before, how thighs can be cut and turned into silk?" And she cut herself and made silk. Then she recited,

"Five and five make ten,  
Frying pan, take your place,  
Firewood, get ready,  
Fire, burn bright!  
Five and five make ten,  
And I'm frying fish tonight."

And upon saying this, she placed her hands in the frying pan,<sup>98</sup> pulled out a large fish, and sent it to the prince piping hot. The servant was quite frightened by all this and told the prince everything he had witnessed.

"Oh, really?" said the new bride when she heard this. "There's nothing really marvelous about it. I can do the very same things."

"Do them, then!" said the prince. And so she began:

"Frying pan, take your place,  
Firewood, get ready,  
Fire, burn bright!"

And she set the frying pan on the stove, added the wood, and lit the fire. When the oil was bubbling, she placed both of her hands in the pan and said,

"Five and five make ten,  
And I'm frying fish tonight."

At that moment the oil flared up, and she caught fire and was burned to death.

<sup>98</sup> Pitrè notes that at this point the narrator indicates with a gesture that the maiden is placing her hands in the frying pan.

Now that his wife was dead, the prince said to the beautiful maiden who was mute, "If you're going to speak, I can wait six more months for you, and then we'll get married. But if you don't speak, I'll take another woman as my wife."

After six months went by, she still refused to speak.

"Well, then," he said, "I'm getting married again." And he soon found himself another wife.

As soon as the wedding was over, he again sent wedding sweets to the mute young maiden. "Here, take these sweets to that young lady," he commanded.

"Oh good Lord," she said to the servant when he brought her the sweets, "how that prince is always going out of his way to please me! But wait just a minute while I do something."

And she continued speaking,

"Firewood, get ready,  
Oven, ignite,  
Light, turn around!"

Then she put herself in the oven and came out with a huge cake.

"Here," she said, "take this to the prince."

"My God," said the servant when he came to the prince, "I'm stunned! What amazing things I've seen! She put herself in the oven and came out with this huge cake."

"Oh, that's nothing," said the bride. "Don't you think I can do the same thing?"

"Do it, then!" said the prince.

So she lit the oven, crawled inside, and there she died.

"Oh my!" said the prince. "Now that mute maiden's caused the death of two of my wives!" So he went straight to her and said, "Do you realize that you've cost me two wives? Why won't you speak? I'll wait another six months for you. If you speak, I'll marry you; if not, I'll take another woman as my wife."

Six months went by, and since she still didn't speak, the prince went and found another fiancée and took her as his wife.

Again, as soon as they came from the church, he said, "Take this sweet to the young maiden."

"Oh," she said to the servant, "how this prince does dote on me! Wait just a minute, I want to give you something." And she began rolling herself down the stairs, breaking her nose in one place and smashing her face in another—and yet when she picked herself up, there was nothing wrong with her at all! Then she gave the servant a fine fish to bring back to the prince.

"Oh my prince, what a wonder I've seen!" said the servant. "I'm trembling with fear." And he handed over the fish.

"What exactly happened?"

And so the servant described all that he had seen.

"Oh really?" said the new bride, "Don't you think I can do that too?"

"Then do it!" said the prince. And she got up and began rolling herself down the stairs. But all that happened was that she broke her nose, knocked her eye out, cracked open her head, and died. And that made three wives.

Well, now the prince stationed himself behind the maiden's door and waited for his opportunity while she talked to herself inside the room and kept going around placing little flasks and bottles all over and reciting,

"Merrily dance, you bottles and flasks,  
Summer weather now is coming,  
And then my daughter-in-law arrives."<sup>99</sup>

"Oh!" exclaimed the prince. "You vixen! So you *can* speak! Now you've cost me three wives, and all for nothing, and you knew how to speak all along! All right, now I'll marry you."

And so he married her, because he really had loved her very much, and all the members of the household loved her more dearly than the pupils of their eyes. Yes, she had played a nasty trick on him, causing his three wives to die, and yet he married her, because she was as beautiful as the sun, with a braid of hair as bright as gold. And it was because she was a fairy that she had done all those remarkable things. So they were married, and lived happy and content, and we are left here without a cent.

*Collected from Ninfa Lobaido by Salvatore Salomone-Marino at Borgetto.*

## 68. THE RAGAMUFFIN



Once upon a time there was a prince whose father, the king, had died. This prince was eager to learn how to hunt. But how do you think he went about doing it? He simply decided one day to go off into the

<sup>99</sup> This last verse, with its reference to a daughter-in-law, is obscure. The fairy maiden may be referring to the daughter-in-law she will have in the future once she has married the prince and had a son. Or, perhaps more likely, she is speaking in the voice of the prince's mother, who had always favored her as a potential daughter-in-law. In any case, the ritual she is performing here with the bottles and flasks remains unexplained and mysterious, and these verses are part of that mystery.

woods with a troop of men. When they got there, he said to them, "You can go off now and leave me here."

So off they went. In the meantime, the prince found an innkeeper, and after spending the night at her inn, he had her prepare the morning meal for him. However, the innkeeper was a wicked woman, who put opium in his wine and planned to rob him of his possessions. But the prince remained on his guard all night and never slept.

The next day, realizing the danger he was in, he decided to spend the night in the woods. And while he was sleeping, along came the princess of that realm, and when she saw him, she marveled at his good looks—for he was truly a handsome fellow—and she decided to put her diamond ring on his finger. When the prince woke up and saw the ring, he asked himself, "Whose ring could this be? Surely it must belong to a princess."

So he went back to stay at the inn, but this time he dressed himself as a poor man. Afterward he went and found the king's gardener and asked him, "Would you please let me stay with you and learn your trade?"

"Yes, my son, of course," replied the gardener, who hired him and gave him an outfit to wear and food to eat.

One day the king's gardener brought him to the royal garden. When the princess saw him, she said, "Make up a beautiful vase of flowers for me," and so he did. The next day she repeated the request, but this time the young man placed the beautiful diamond in the midst of the flowers. Entering the palace he found a maid and said to her, "My good woman, take this bouquet to the queen."

When the queen saw the diamond ring, she quickly realized what was going on and had the young man brought to her. When he came, he was reserved and said, "What does your Majesty wish?"

"Come closer."

But he still acted in a reserved manner, and she had to compel him to come closer, all ragged and shabby as he was. They finally got to talking and came to an understanding.

The next day the princess went to her father and told him she had decided to marry the gardener's apprentice, but her father tried to talk her out of it.

"Who is it you're marrying? This ragamuffin without a stitch of decent clothing? Go ahead then, but don't ever speak to me again!"

The princess was stubborn and went ahead with her marriage, and she and her husband went off to a distant land. After some time had passed, her sister was also planning to marry, and her father the king sent invitations to all the barons of the land. Now the poor ragamuffin, after his marriage, had

naturally become a handsome young man again. As soon as he learned of his sister-in-law's wedding, he dressed up and went to his father-in-law.

"Who's there?"

"May I please come in and have a word with your royal highness? I've come to lend my presence to the grandeur of the occasion."

After they had sat down at the banquet table, the young prince, who had brought his wife with him, said to his father-in-law,

"Your majesty, whatever happened to that daughter of yours who married a short time ago?"

"I never speak of her or ask about her anymore. She chose to marry a ragamuffin, and that's what she deserves."

"And would you recognize that daughter?"

"No."

Then the prince lifted the seven veils from his wife's face and presented her to the king.

"This woman is your daughter, and I am the ragamuffin."

Once the king saw this handsome couple, he could do nothing but lift the crown off his own head and put it on that of the prince.

Now they have joy that never vanishes,

But we remain here like a bunch of radishes.

*Collected from a mountain woman in Etna, together with two other tales.*

## 69. THE FISHERMAN

**I**t's been told that once upon a time there was a fisherman, whose son was so handsome and charming that he was the delight of all the villagers. Whenever this son saw his father going off to fish, he wanted to accompany him, but the father would forbid it, saying, "No, my son, because if bad weather came, you'd be lost."

When the boy turned nine, he refused to be put off any longer and said, "Father, now I'm going with you, and the first fish that I catch I'll bring to the king and give it to him as a present."

So when they were out at sea, the lad cast his line and began to fish, and all at once he pulled in a fine large fish. "I'm going to take this to the king," he told his father. And when they had finished their fishing, they returned home.

The next morning the boy packed the fish in a basket with some cool algae, dressed himself in his best clothes, and went to the palace. There they

received him and let him enter with no fuss, and he presented himself to the king. He was a spirited lad, and he told the king his story and offered him the fish. The king was pleased to see this fine fish and turned to his chamberlains and said, "Excellent! Give this little fisherman fifty gold coins at once." Then he said to him,

"What is your name?"

"Pidduzzu, your Majesty."

"Well, then, Pidduzzu, tell me: how would you like to stay here in the palace?"

"Please God that I may!"

"Well, then, here's what you must do. Go to your father and say that the king wants you to live with him."

With no further ado he went home, told his father, and came back to the palace. The king had him dressed in fine clothes and brought teachers and tutors to instruct him, and after a few years he had become an educated man, and was no longer called Pidduzzu but Cavalier Don Pippinu.

Now there was a young maiden in the palace, the king's daughter, Pippina. She loved this young man like a brother, because the king had told her they were brother and sister. But eventually someone whispered in her ear the secret that this was not her brother, and her brain began to whirl. When Pippinu and Pippina reached the age of awareness, they fell in love.

Now the king's daughter turned seventeen and was introduced to a handsome prince. However, she could only think about Pippinu and nobody else, and she declared to her father that if she had to wed, it would be Pippinu or no one at all. When the king heard this, he flew into a rage and called for Pippinu.

"My daughter has gone out of her mind over you, so I'll have to send you away from here. There are certain things I just won't tolerate!"

"Oh, your majesty, do you really want to send me off like this?"

"I regret doing so, my boy. But don't worry. You'll still be under my protection."

Then he had his daughter taken by carriage to the monastery of Santa Caterina in Palermo and kept under lock and key. That was his way of avoiding trouble.

Now Don Pippinu had to leave the palace and find lodging at an inn. Where else could the poor fellow go? But this inn had a window that faced a wall with an opening in it, and the monastery had a window on the other side of this wall. And who do you think was at that monastery window?—The princess Pippina!

As soon as they saw one another, they began to console each other.

"My dear Pippinu, don't give in to despair, because this will soon be over. Tomorrow I shall give you two books of magic, and whatever you find written there, you must carry out."

Early the next morning the king went to visit his daughter.

"How is my girl doing?" he asked the Mother Superior and went in to see her. After he had gone, Pippina tiptoed up to Pippinu's window.

"Pippinu, Pippinu!" she called, "here are the books." And she handed them to him and left.

Two days later she called for her father and said the following:

"All right, father, it's now time to put an end to all this. Here's my plan. You equip Pippinu with a brigantine ship, and both he and the prince who wants my hand will sail away on a long voyage. The one who can bring me back the best prizes will be the one I marry."

"An excellent plan," said the king. "I approve."

And so he summoned both Pippinu and the prince and revealed the contest that his daughter had proposed, and both young men agreed. The prince liked it because he knew that Don Pippinu was penniless, and Don Pippinu liked it because he had an ace up his sleeve.<sup>100</sup> And so they each set out on their course.

As soon as he was out to sea, Don Pippinu opened the first book, which said, "Proceed five months without stopping." So he sailed on and on, with the wind at his stern, until the sailors began to complain. But he endured their complaints and forged ahead, until he was one day short of the five-month period. Then he opened the second book, which said, "Tomorrow drop anchor at the first land you come to. Then go ashore with a crowbar and a group of men." The next day he sighted land, moored his ship, and went ashore with the crowbar and the men. As soon as his foot touched land, he opened the book again. "At the exact center you will find a large stone, then a second and a third. Lift them all up with the crowbar and then descend."

And that's just what he did. He found the first stone and lifted it up with the crowbar, then the second and third, and when all three were out of the ground, a beautiful stairway appeared. After he went down, what do you think he found? A large gallery made entirely of gold pieces, including the walls, the portals, and even the ground. There was a table with twenty-four place settings and a golden statue at every place, with embroidered napkins, spoons, forks, saltshakers, and candles all made of gold. Everything was solid gold. Pippinu looked at the book: "Take it all!" it said. So he called his men

100 We have substituted a modern idiom for the Sicilian "he knew just where the hare was sleeping," *sapia unni ci durmia lu lebru*.

and ordered them to load up everything. Indeed, they needed twelve days to load those twenty-four golden statues because they could barely carry two a day.

Once more Pippinu opened the book: "Leave the stones the way you found them." So he closed up the gallery, placed the stones back on top, covered them with dirt, and quickly he was back on board the ship. Once on board he picked up the second book. "Hoist your sail and resume your voyage," it said. And so he did.

After a month of sailing, the sailors began to grumble again.

"Captain, where are you taking us?"

"Courage, lads, and full speed ahead. Our voyage is rich, and we are up to the challenge."

Two days later he opened the book: "Tomorrow you'll come to an island: disembark there."

He reached the island, moored, disembarked, and opened the book:

"In the middle of this island you'll find a large stone. Lift it up, then the next two, go down the stairway, and take whatever you find."

He found the stones and lifted them, went down the stairs, and there he found a great table covered with gold brooches, fruit bowls with all kinds of golden fruit, and then dainty soups, and whatever else the good Lord had created. And all around there were jars of alchemical earth<sup>101</sup> piled up with pieces of cheese made of gold. When he read the book, it said, "You'll see a small jar that contains a balm that can heal any disease: take it with you." So he called all his sailors and had some carry one thing and others carry another, and he carried the jar himself. When this great chore was finished, he opened the book once more: "Now make your voyage home," and so he set sail for Palermo.

Now this was a period in which Turkish corsairs were on the sea looking for Christians to capture. So as Don Pippinu was sailing along, looking at nothing but sea and sky, and more sea and sky, the Turks suddenly attacked and captured his ship. He and his pilot were seized, taken to Turkey, and brought before the Sultan Balalicchi. After an interpreter was summoned, King Balalicchi asked, "Where are these men from?"

"They are Sicilians, your Highness," answered the interpreter.

"Sicilians! Quickly, then—tie up the sailors two by two, and throw them in prison! And as for the captain and the pilot, have them carry heavy stones and give them only a slice of bread and a glass of water each morning."

101 Pitrè says he asked the narrator to explain this term, and she said it was soil that turns to gold as soon as you touch it.

Well, you can imagine the state these poor fellows were in! Poor Don Pippinu! He could think of nothing but the princess who was waiting for him—but now, who knew how things would turn out? And he wept and wept.

Now this King Balalicchi happened to be suffering from an itchy mange, and there was no cure for him. Don Pippinu got wind of this, and he sent word to Balalicchi that if he would set him free, he would cure his malady.

“I’ll grant whatever you wish,” said Balalicchi, “so long as you cure me of this misery.”

Don Pippinu wouldn’t take his word for it. So he had him sign a document, and with this document in his pocket he went to his ship. He found it abandoned on land, and nothing in it had been touched. He took some balm from his little jar and went back to Balalicchi. After he made the king lie down, he put some of the balm on a feather, began to rub the king’s mangy head and then his whole face and neck. That night a black layer fell from Balalicchi, dark as a snake. The next morning Pippinu rubbed his chest and stomach with the balm, and that night another layer fell off. By the fourth day Pippinu was a free man and set sail with his entire crew.

He sailed and sailed and in a few days entered the port of Palermo and greeted the city. Then he immediately took a carriage and raced into town to see Pippina. You can imagine their joy! When the king saw him, he made him welcome and asked him to take a seat.

“Well, Don Pippinu, what do we have to show?”

“Nothing, your Majesty. Only God knows what I went through! But it’s nothing to talk about now that it’s over. What I want now is a gallery in which I can display what I’ve brought back. It really amounts to nothing, but for that little nothing that it is . . .”

And then he began having his men unload all those golden statues, all those brooches, fruit bowls, cheeses, and place settings of gold. For an entire month, even though he asked for helpers, he did nothing but carry things. Finally, when it seemed to him that everything was in place, he summoned the king.

“Your Majesty, tomorrow I’ll be ready to conclude our agreement. First look at the prince’s things, then look at mine.”

So the next morning the king went and saw what the prince had brought: they were ornaments and finery and such, and the king made the appropriate compliments. Then they all went to see Don Pippinu’s things. The moment they were inside, the prince was nowhere to be seen: he was already flying down the staircase, four and five steps at a time, in such total disgrace that he had no choice but to sail away on the first ship he could find.

The king began to shout, “Long live Don Pippinu! Long live Don Pippinu!”

Then the two of them went to fetch Pippina from the Santa Caterina monastery, and in three days the young people were man and wife.

But Pippinu still wasn't fully satisfied because he didn't know what had become of his father and mother. He searched for them, and with God's help he found them. They exchanged their old clothes for garments that befit the parents of a prince, and thus they came to stay in the palace.

So they all lived happy and content,  
While we remain here and can't pay the rent.

*Collected from Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 70. FILIPPEDDU

**O**ne upon a time there was a king whose son was his only child. One day his wife died, leaving him a widower. He took a new wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy. Soon she became jealous of her stepson and made plans to poison him.

Meanwhile, the stepson decided one day to go to a fair, and on his way he came across a little horse, and because he liked it so much, he bought the horse. When he returned home his father asked him, "Why are you back so soon, my boy?"

"Father, I found this little horse on my way to the fair, and I bought it."

Ever since that day, the prince stopped at the stable to visit his little horse on his way to school. He paid him so much attention that finally he ended up teaching him to talk.

Now let's leave them there and go back to the queen.

"How can I manage to poison my stepson," she thought, "so that my own son can be the first-born? I think I'll have to enlist the aid of the doctor."

So she had the doctor summoned and spoke to him with the authority of a queen.

"Doctor, how can we have my stepson poisoned?"

"My queen, you should pretend you are sick and let me prescribe the medicine you need."

So she got into bed and pretended she was sick. At once the king called for the doctor.

"Your Majesty, this is quite a serious illness that your queen is suffering from."

"Well, isn't there some cure for this illness?"

"Yes, there is, your Majesty, but I'm afraid you're not going to like it."

"I don't care what it takes, so long as the queen is cured."

"If you take no action, she is as good as dead. But the one thing that can save her is the blood of your son Filippeddu, transferred from his veins to hers."

"Oh, this is too much! Must my son die in order for my wife to live?"

But then a number of people intervened, all saying, "Your royal Highness, sons may come and go, but a wife cannot come back again."

So many spoke this way that the king finally bowed his head in consent and relented—his son would have to die in order to save his wife. When the king's son came back from school that day, singing and whistling happily, he stopped at his little horse's stall and found the animal downcast.

"What's bothering you, my little horse? What's making you look so glum?"

"Oh, Filippeddu, it's because of you that I'm so sad—you're facing death. But don't let it discourage you. Instead, take heart and do as I tell you. Saddle me up and say to your father that you want to go down into the garden for two hours."

So the young man went up into the palace, greeted the king and queen, kissed their hands, and asked permission to spend a little time in the garden with his horse. The king replied, "Of course, my son, go and enjoy yourself." And then he mumbled to himself, "at least he'll have some pleasure before he dies."

The young man went down to the stable and saddled his little horse.

"Now do what I tell you, Filippeddu," said the horse. "First, you must tie a good-sized vessel under my belly, and then goad me into a full-scale gallop so that all the sweat that pours from me collects inside this vessel. As soon as I reach the place I'm heading for, I'll fall down dead, but don't let this bother you. Whenever you have need of me, take one of my tail hairs, wet it in my sweat, and you shall have all your comforts, including your palace and your pages and everything else that you need."

So the young man mounted the horse and rode, and when they reached a certain place, the horse fell down and died. Then the prince collected the sweat and took the tail and went on his way.

After he had gone on awhile, he thought, "I want to see if this works just as my horse said it would." So he pulled a hair from the tail, dipped it in the sweat, and there before him appeared his palace, with one servant bringing him food from one direction and another servant from another direction, and all his comforts were there. When he put the hair back, everything became as it was before, and he continued on his way.

Eventually he came to a city ruled by a king, and the royal palace had a garden in front of it. The young prince took lodging with the gardener, pretending to be a poor vagrant in need of his daily bread. He had placed a bladder on his head like a cap, pretending that he had the mange, and said his name was Filippeddu.

Now this gardener had a morning routine: he would collect three bouquets of flowers and bring them to the king's three daughters.

"Oh master, let me be the one who brings them the flowers this morning," said the young man, "and perhaps they will give me some bread."

"But you wouldn't know how to do it."

"Oh please let me try, good master, and if they like it, fine, and if they don't, then you can bring them."

And so the young man made the three bouquets of flowers, and you can imagine how he labored to make each one more beautiful than the next. The three princesses were delighted at the sight of him arriving with these bouquets, and they said, "From now on, you're the one who should bring us flowers every morning." And as they took the flowers, they gave him two silver coins as a present. When he went back to the gardener, he pretended not to know what these coins were.

"What good are these to me?" he said. "If only they had given me a piece of bread, I'd be happy."

"This fellow really is a simpleton," said the gardener to himself. And then to the young man,

"Yes, these aren't for you. Let me have them, and I'll give you your piece of bread. And every morning I'll send you to the princesses, and whatever they give you, hand it over to me and I'll give you your bread."

That evening, when it grew dark, this young man went to his bed in the stable. There was an opening there that faced the house where the youngest of the princesses slept. He took out a hair of his horse, dipped it in the sweat, and again the palace appeared, with all its bright lights and staff of servants. The princess was looking out her window and beheld the grand palace. "What's this?" she said. "That's the place where Filippeddu sleeps! How can this be?" So the next evening she watched carefully and observed the whole procedure, with the horse's tail and all, and she was convinced that this fellow must really be a prince.

The next morning she went to her father, the king, and asked his permission to take Filippeddu as her husband.

"You wretched girl!" said the king. "How can you want to marry this mangy fellow?"

"I'm sorry, father. Either you allow us to marry, or I'll run away with him."

The king was taken aback—he hadn't expected such a response—and he granted her wish.

"All right, marry him then," he said, "but please remove yourself from my sight."

And so they were married, and he took her to the stable where he made his bed. Her two sisters were also married now, each having wed a prince. Every day they boasted to their sister about what wonderful husbands and how they enjoyed their kisses here and kisses there. Meanwhile, their poor sister grew more and more miserable.

"I wonder if my eyes deceived me?" she said, for Filipeddu no longer made any use of the horse's tail.

Meanwhile a war had been declared, and the sisters' husbands went off to do battle because whoever came back victorious with a banner would be granted a title.

"I think I'll go off to war, too, and see if I can win that banner," Filipeddu declared.

"Yes, go," said his wife, thinking to herself that at least she'd be rid of him.

So he mounted a lame donkey, holding a rusty old gun in front of him, and rode off. When he reached a certain place, he pulled out a horse's hair and dipped it in the sweat. Immediately he found himself mounted on a great imperial steed with a sword at his side, and off he rode to do battle. As soon as he arrived he drew his sword and *swish! swoosh!*—he seized the banner and returned home. His brothers-in-law did not recognize him. One of them came up to him and asked,

"Good cavalier, would you be so kind as to give me that banner so that we can show our father-in-law that we have taken it?"

"I'll gladly give it to you," he answered, "but only on the condition that you allow me to cut off your little finger."

And the fellow readily agreed to have his finger cut off so he could get the banner.

When they returned home, you can imagine what pleasure it gave their wives to see that they had brought home the banner. Indeed, the princesses danced in front of them and mocked their sister for having a mangy lout for a husband.

The following day they went to battle again, and Filipeddu carried out the same maneuver. He got the banner, and his other brother-in-law made the same request. Filipeddu gave it to him on the condition that he allow him to cut off a small piece of his ear, and he did. Again they came back to their father-in-law, and their wives rejoiced.

The next day a royal banquet was announced for all the members of the

court. Everyone was happily eating, while Filippeddu sat off in a corner. At one point, the two princesses began teasing their sister for having such an ugly wretch for a husband, and Filippeddu finally stood up and stripped the covering from his head. Then he turned to his brothers-in-law and said, "Are you really the ones who captured the banners?"

He took out the little finger and the piece of ear and let everyone see them.

"No, I am the one who took the banners, and you are nothing but a pack of scoundrels!" he announced, and he pulled out a hair from his horse. He was now dressed like an emperor, and he took delight in attacking the faults of everyone there. His wife turned to her sisters and said, "It is *you* who have wretches for husbands! But I knew how to choose a good one!"

So they remained husband and wife,  
While I go barefoot all my life.

*Collected in Buccheri from a friend of Mattia di Martino, who gave it to Pitirè.*

## 71. THE CYCLOPS

**H**ere's a story brought back from a voyage.

Once there was a king who was married. Well, one day his friends came to him and said,

"Your Majesty, you should watch your queen because she's been having unexplained absences."

After hearing this, the king was sitting at the table one day when he accused the queen of having an affair, but she strongly denied it. So the king decided to spy on her privately, and he discovered a secret staircase which people went up and down.

So he decided to have the queen seized and imprisoned in a special cave he had built into the middle of this staircase, and these orders were carried out. There she was kept and given only a slice of bread and a glass of water every day. Eventually she found herself pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy.

This boy grew day by day for twelve years, and would often ask,

"Why are we here, mother?"

"My son," she replied, "my sins have put us here."

"Do I have a father?"

"Yes, you do, and he is the king."

Well, the boy and his mother began to scrape away at the hole through which food came to them, and the boy finally managed to get out.

"Are you brave enough for this undertaking?" his mother asked.

"Yes I am," he replied.

"Then let me tell you what you have to do. Go up the stairs, and you'll discover seven rooms all in a row. While your father is sleeping, reach under his mattress, and you'll find a magic sword. Pull it out slowly and carefully, and then go down to the stables and take the best horse you can find. Put on its saddle and bridle and then come back to get me. We'll mount and ride away, because if your father learns about this he'll have us both killed."

So the boy did what she told him to do and rode away with his mother. After they were in the countryside for a while, they both became very hungry. So the boy said to his mother, "You ride the horse down the road a bit while I go around foraging for something to eat."

While he was searching, he came across a very beautiful pear tree, with two creatures living beneath it. They were the tree's custodians. They had only one eye in their forehead and were called Cyclopes.

The boy had his sword strapped to his side, and since he was feeling very hungry, he climbed the pear tree and began picking the pears and eating them. Then he packed as many as he could under his shirt and began climbing down. But the noise woke up the Cyclopes, and they wanted to tear him apart limb by limb, but he took out his sword and slew them both.

While he was doing all this, his mother had met up with another Cyclops, and she asked him, "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to my beautiful house, which is only five miles from here and filled with the most delicious food one can eat."

"Well then, I have a plan," she said. "I have a son who is about to come looking for me, but I'll send him away again. You go on ahead to your house, and then I'll come and find you there."

So the Cyclops left, and soon her son arrived.

"I ask your blessings, mother. Just look! I found a pear tree and brought you pears you can eat to your heart's content."

After she had finished eating the pears, her son said,

"Why don't you keep going ahead, and I'll search again for something we can eat."

So he went off searching, and his mother went on to the palace of the Cyclops. She had good food there, and she and the Cyclops enjoyed one another. Meanwhile, her son came looking for his mother, and he arrived at the beautiful palace where she was living. When she saw him approach, she said to the Cyclops, "My son is coming! When he sees the horse, he'll know I'm here, and he'll enter the palace. Hide yourself in this chest, and I'll cover you with clothing."

When the young man arrived, he entered through the portals, and when he came to the stables, he saw his horse. Then he went upstairs and found his mother.

“Mother, who’s living in this palace?”

“Nobody lives here, my son.”

“Well, is there any food here? All God’s creatures must eat.”

So his mother gave him some food.

Then he said to her, “Mother, I’m going to take the horse and do a bit of hunting.”

“Of course, my boy, go and have a good time.”

So he took his horse and went off to hunt with his magic sword by his side. Therefore, when he saw a rabbit in his lair, he simply had to swing his sword, and it fell dead. As he continued to hunt, he came upon a beautiful pear tree, a huge one with twelve Cyclopes guarding it. They attacked the lad, but he drew his sword and killed them all.

Now he noticed that just opposite this pear tree there was another very beautiful palace. Four princesses lived there. They had been captured by a sorcerer and had caught his attention by waving their handkerchiefs. When he approached, they invited him inside and asked him whose son he was.

“I am the son of a king,” he responded.

So they had a magnificent table set, ate dinner with him, and fed barley to his horse. Then he said to them, “I must take leave of you, because about four miles from here there is another beautiful palace, where I left my mother.”

After he departed, he approached the other palace, and when his mother saw him coming, she told the Cyclops to hide. The young man arrived, dismounted, and carried the game he had caught upstairs and gave it to his mother, kissing her hands as he always did as a sign of reverence. The mother took the game, prepared it, and made a beautiful meal for her son. But as soon as he had finished eating and rose from the table, she began crying out,

“Oh, what terrible pains! I must be dying!”

“Oh, mother dear, tell me what can cure these pains. I’ll do anything you say.”

“Oh, my son, whenever I had these pains at your father’s house, I would send someone to fetch me some of the water of Ciblicanna.”

“At once, mother, I’m on my way!”

So he got on his horse and went off in search of the water of Ciblicanna. On his way he passed the palace with the four princesses and stopped in to see them. After they had fed his horse barley and given him a meal, he asked them,

“Can you tell me anything about the water of Ciblicanna?”

"Oh, dear young man," they said, "many youths have gone there, and none have ever returned! So here's what you must do: you must take this road straight ahead, and you will come to a meadow with a great number of oxen. Kill one of them, and fill your two saddlebags with chunks of their meat and continue a bit further on that road. You'll come upon two lions holding maces in their hands. Between these two lions is the fountain of the water of Ciblicanna. Take the meat and throw a handful to each lion. While they are eating it, be brave and take a water-jug, fill it up, and quickly leave. When you've done this successfully, come back here to us."

The young man mounted his horse and departed. He came to the meadow, killed the ox, and filled his two saddlebags with the meat. He went on to find the two lions and threw them the meat, and while they were eating it, he filled the jug with the water of Ciblicanna. He returned to his horse and rode back to the maidens who had given him these instructions. When they saw him returning with the water, they again set the table, dined with him, and fed barley to his horse. But while he was eating his meal, they took away the water of Ciblicanna and replaced it with ordinary water. So this was the water he took to his mother.

When his mother saw him approach, she began moaning again, "Oh, what terrible pains! I must be dying!"

He ran upstairs with the water and gave it to her. After she drank it, she said her pains had ceased. The next thing she did was to offer her son a meal.

Then she said to him, "Do you know a game your father and I used to play? We would plant five spikes in the ground, and then I would lie on them spread-eagled for a bit and then he would do the same thing, and we would get up and enjoy a laugh."

"All right," he said, "let's plant the spikes in the ground, and we too can play the same game."

As soon as the spikes were in the ground, she stuck her son on them first, and once he was attached to them, she called the Cyclops. Then she took her son's sword, and they killed him and cut him into little pieces that they put into a knapsack and placed upon the horse. Afterward, they sent the horse out to wander as it pleased. Since the horse was accustomed to go to the other palace, that's where it went. When the young princesses found the horse, they brought it inside and took off the knapsack. After they opened it and emptied its contents, they found the young man's body in pieces. So, they put all the pieces back together to form a human body, and then they went and got the water of Ciblicanna. They sprinkled it all over the body, and the young man came back to life, as good as new.

"Oh, what a deep sleep I've had!" he said to the princesses.

"But look where we found you!" they replied, and they told him all that had happened to him.

"And now what I am supposed to do with this mother of mine?" he asked.

"Go back to her and act very angry," they said. "Search all the rooms and all the chests until you find the Cyclops, and then bring him into the largest room and say the following to your mother."<sup>102</sup>

"Mother, I have given you many pleasures, and now you owe me one."

"What do you want me to do?" she replied.

"You must start out from that corner of the room, and the Cyclops from the opposite corner, and when you meet in the middle, you must embrace."

They did this, and as they were embracing, he took the sword and cut off both their heads. At once the spell cast on the palaces was broken, and the young prince returned to the palace where the princesses were living. They greeted him saying, "Now that we are free of the spell we were under, you are our master and may do as you wish with the four of us."

"Tell me whose daughters you are," he said, "and I'll take you one by one back to your fathers."

So they all returned to Palermo, where they took a ship to Naples. He provided living quarters for the other princesses in a beautiful inn, and he took one to the royal court and delivered her to her father the king. The king was beside himself with joy to have his daughter back, and he offered her in marriage to the young prince, but he declined. Then, after a great exchange of courtesies, he took his leave and proceeded to travel to the royal courts of Portugal, Spain, and Russia, where he delivered each maiden to her father the king. Each of these rulers wanted him for a son-in-law, but since the ruler of Russia was an Emperor, his daughter was the one he chose. She was a rare and exceptional beauty—and had bushels of money besides. So it ends: they were married and celebrated with a grand festival ball.

Indeed, they lived on content as husband and wife,

While we work and toil away without a life.

*Told by the marble worker Giuseppe Restivo to Gaetano Di Giovanni in Cianciana.*

102 At this point what is presented as the future dialogue between mother and son takes over the narrative and becomes the action that is actually happening. Pitre has a note explaining that this phenomenon sometimes occurs in these tales, because the emotions of the narrators carry them away into this kind of spontaneity.

## 72. THE DAUGHTER OF THE MERCHANT OF PALERMO

Once upon a time there was a merchant in Palermo, who had an only daughter, and he was extremely protective of her. One day he received a summons to appear before the King of Naples. The poor fellow was thrown into great confusion and said to himself, "But how can I leave my daughter alone?"

He went home and told his daughter what the problem was.

"Father, why are you so upset about this?" she said.

"Why shouldn't I be upset?" he replied. "The king has summoned me to Naples."

"Is that all that's bothering you?" she said. "You can leave me here with the windows, shutters, and doors nailed shut, and close every other opening in the building. Just leave me with a supply of provisions, and as long as I have water, the Lord will take care of the rest."

"An excellent idea," he said. "I'll go now to see the man who delivers water."

So he had everything provided for her, closed up the house, and departed. But we know what water suppliers are like: for two days the man did not deliver any water. The poor girl began searching the house, upset that she couldn't find any water. While she was searching, she found a room with an opening that led down into a well. She went down the well and found another opening that led to a window, and this window looked out on the garden of the king. When the young maiden peered from the window, she saw the queen coming. She watched her take a key from her hair, open a little door, and enter a room inhabited by a little Turk. Every day the queen brought him food and shut herself in with him. The following day the maiden watched again, and the queen did the same thing. In a fit of anger the maiden seized a pomegranate from a tree that grew by the window and threw it into the queen's face, and the queen swallowed some as it burst.

When the queen failed to reappear in the palace, people were upset and began asking, "Where is the queen? Where did she go?"

Well, they looked high and low for her and finally found her dead in the garden. You can imagine what a scene that caused! They carried her up into the palace, laid her out on a funeral bier, and paid their last respects. The king wept over the loss of his queen whom he would never see again. Because of this disaster, he refused to see anyone at all: he accepted no visitors and shunned all company.

Meanwhile the merchant returned from Naples, and his first thought on

entering Palermo was to see his daughter and to visit the king. He stopped first at the palace, and after learning the news, he was astonished to see the king so altered by the terrible loss of his wife. Then he went home and reported all this to his daughter.

"My daughter, I'm truly amazed that such a disaster has befallen the king, and left him so totally changed from the man he was."

"Father, would you be willing to take me to pay a visit to the king?"

"Yes, of course I'll take you."

When they got there, the maiden began to console the king, and then as a final comfort, she said to him, "You should be content, your Majesty, that I myself killed the queen with a pomegranate I threw at her."

"What? Oh, you vile murderess! You killed my wife and have the nerve to say it to my face?"

"Yes, your Majesty, but you should first hear my reason and then tell me if I did the right thing or not."

And she recounted the whole story of the well, the window, the little Turk, and how the queen brought him food every day and shut herself in with him.

"I watched this same performance for two days, and then I had a fit of anger and threw the pomegranate and killed her."

The king could not believe that this was really true. But the clever maiden said,

"Your Majesty, if you don't believe me, let's go to where the queen is laid out, and I'll show you that I'm telling the truth."

"All right, let's go there," said the king.

As soon as they got there, the maiden undid the queen's hair, and out fell the key. With the key in her hand she led the king to the garden and opened the door. There was the little Turk, half dead. When the king saw this, he said, "You were right!" and immediately his anger left him. He took her to his palace and said, "You're the one who shall be my wife."

The father was sent a formal request and didn't have to be asked twice. The wedding was arranged, and a week later the merchant's daughter and the king were man and wife.

So they remained in contentment and peace,

While we have to sit here, cleaning our teeth.

*Collected in Palermo from Giovanni Patuano.*

## 73. WHITE FLOWER

**H**ere's a tale for you, my good gentlemen, one that's been told over and over. Once upon a time there was a husband whose wife gave birth to nothing but girls. The husband was very upset because he wanted a boy. So when his wife was pregnant again, he said to her, "If you have another girl, I'll have her killed." This made the poor woman terribly anxious, but she did give birth to another girl. Fearing what her husband would do, she said to the midwife, "You take the creature yourself and do whatever you want with her."

The midwife took charge of the child, saying, "Oh, whatever am I going to do with this little girl?" So she went out into the countryside and found a shrub of white flowers and laid the baby on top of it.

Now, there was a hermit living in this countryside, who had a pet doe that had recently given birth and was nursing. Each day the doe would go out to forage for food and then return to the cave to nurse her little fawns. But one day when the fawns tried to nurse from her, they found she had run dry of milk. This went on day after day until the poor little ones were dying of hunger. The hermit, poor fellow, saw how they were suffering and decided to follow the doe. To his surprise he discovered that she was giving her milk to a little baby girl. So he brought the baby back to the cave and said to the doe, "You can nurse her here, but don't forget to keep some milk for your little ones."

From then on, the hermit took it upon himself to accustom the child to regular food, and she grew rapidly and turned into a lovely young woman. She took care of the hermit's house, and he grew to love her as if she were his own daughter.

Now, one day it happened that the king of the realm was out hunting, and a huge storm erupted. The thunder, wind, and rain drove the king to take shelter at the hermit's house. When the hermit saw the king all soaked with rain, he called out, "White Flower! White Flower, bring a chair and light a fire so we can give his lordship what he needs." Upon hearing her name, the king asked, "My good hermit, where ever did you get the name 'White Flower' for her?"

"My lord," replied the hermit, "I had a deer who was nursing her young, and after a while she began coming back without one drop of milk left. So I followed her and discovered that she was lying down with a young child that she was nursing. Since this child was resting on top of a shrub with white flowers, I decided to name her 'White Flower.' "

“Old hermit,” said the king after he had heard this, “would you let me take this maiden back to my palace and educate her? You must realize that, given your advanced age, she will not be safe staying here alone in this deserted countryside.”

“Your Majesty,” replied the old man, “my love for this child is so great that I will gladly let you take her. There is so much more that you, a king, can do for her than I, a poor hermit, can possibly do.”

So the king had her mount his horse and sit in front of him. Then he rode away. When he arrived at the palace, the king put some ladies in charge of educating the young maiden. Her excellent qualities soon became apparent to him, and he said to himself, “I couldn’t choose a better wife than this woman,” and they were married. And that is the way White Flower became queen of the realm.

Now, the king was crazy about his new bride, but one day he was obliged to take a trip. “White Flower,” he said to her, “I must take this trip, and my greatest pain is having to part from you.”

White Flower was upset at this news, but had no choice but to let him depart. Now, one evening while the king was far from his realm, he found himself in the company of princes and knights, who were all boasting about their wives. The king said, “You can boast all you want about your own wives, but I can assure you that no one can possibly have a wife as perfect as mine.”

One of the knights answered him and said, “Your Majesty, let’s see if you’re willing to bet on it. I’ll go to Palermo, and during the time that you’re away I’ll bet I can become intimate with your wife.”

“That can never happen,” said the king. “It’s quite impossible.”

“Shall we make a bet, then?” the knight responded.

“It’s a bet!” replied the king.

They agreed that the prize would be a fiefdom and the time period would be one month, and the knight departed.

Once he got to Palermo, he began camping night and day under the balcony of the royal palace. Days came and went, but he never got so much as a glimpse of the young queen. She was always behind closed windows. Then one day, as he was walking along feeling desperate, he met an old woman who was begging for alms.

“Go away and stop bothering me!” he said.

“Why are you so upset, good sir?” she asked him.

“None of your business! Leave me alone!”

“But sir,” she replied, “if you’d tell me what’s bothering you I may be able to help you.”

"Well, I've made a bet," he replied, "that I can get inside this palace or at least find out what the queen looks like."

"My good sir," she replied, "you can stop worrying. Let me take care of this."

So the old woman prepared a basket with eggs and fruit in it and went to the palace asking to speak with the queen. When she was before the queen, she embraced her and whispered, "My child, you may not recognize me, but I am a close relative of yours, and I am pleased to bring you these little gifts." The queen decided to let her stay in the palace and gave orders that everyone treat her with the utmost respect. Because she knew nothing about her own family, she really believed this old woman was related to her, and so she trusted her completely. Consequently the old woman was free to enter and leave the queen's bedroom at any hour she wished, and to do as she pleased.

One day the old woman entered while the queen was asleep. She approached the bed and began kissing her and saying, "My child, how lovely you are." As she shifted the bedcovers a bit, she noticed that the queen had a very beautiful mole on her left shoulder. So what do you think she did? She took a little scissors and cut the tiny hair that grew from the mole. Then she left the palace, delighted with her discovery.

When the knight had this hair in his possession as well as a description of the queen's appearance, he was overjoyed and rewarded the old woman handsomely. When the fixed date arrived, he went to meet the king. All the other lords and knights had gathered there to see who would win the bet. The cavalier spoke first and said, "Your Majesty, I've accomplished my task. Isn't it true that your wife has such and such an appearance and manner?" (And he described her in detail.)

"Yes, of course," answered the king, "but there are many ways you could have found this out. I remain confident that you couldn't have been intimate with my wife."

"Your Majesty, isn't it a fact that your wife has a mole on her left shoulder? And here is the proof."

Upon saying this, he handed the king a rolled up piece of paper that contained the secret that only the king knew. Struck speechless, he immediately boarded a ship and sailed back to his country. When he arrived at the palace, the queen was thrilled with his return and ran to meet him. But he ordered a carriage to be prepared and simply said to his wife, "Get in!" Well, good sirs, you can just imagine how the queen's heart was broken! He drove all the way to the foot of Mount Pellegrino.<sup>103</sup> When they arrived, he forced her to get

103 A mountain two miles west of Palermo, where there is a famous sanctuary of St. Rosalia.

out and struck her with such a savage blow that she fell to the ground and began bleeding. Then he hurried back to his palace.

Let us now leave this king, who had been completely deceived, and turn instead to a doctor who had made a vow to visit Mount Pellegrino when his little girl was born. Husband and wife had set out with their servant, a slave called Ali.<sup>104</sup> Just as they arrived at the foothills of the mountain, they heard someone groaning.

“Let’s see what this is,” said the husband. Once they came to the spot where the sound was, what do you think they saw? A young woman was lying on the ground, wounded and half dead. The doctor bandaged her wound as best he could and then said to his wife, “For today we should abandon our trip and go right back home with this poor young woman and try to heal her.”

And so they brought her back to their house, where the doctor treated her, and she was restored to health. The husband and wife kept asking her about the terrible thing that had happened, but she was cautious and refused to tell them anything.

While she was living in this doctor’s house, the young woman took charge of caring for the little baby girl, and the doctor’s wife was delighted to have found such a good and virtuous helper. One day the husband said to his wife, “Why don’t we leave the young woman here with the child, and we can go and fulfill our vow to Saint Rosalia.”

So the following morning they got up, took their slave Ali with them, left the young woman and the baby sleeping, and went on their way. Once they had come part of the way, the slave exclaimed, “Oh, master! I forgot something. I forgot to bring the meat for our lunch.”

“All right, Ali, run back quickly and get it, and we’ll wait here for you.”

Now this servant had developed a mortal hatred for the new helper because he thought his masters loved her much more than they loved him. So, when he came to the house, opened the door, and found the two innocent creatures still lying asleep, he took a knife and slit the little girl’s throat and went running back to his masters. Now let’s leave them as they continue on their journey, and go back to the young woman.

When the poor thing woke up she found herself all covered with blood. Then she looked at the little child and saw that its throat was slit. “Oh, how awful! Poor me! What will happen when the parents come back and find their child like this?”

So she went around the house looking for a window. Once she found it, she

104 This is a generic name used here and in other tales to indicate a Moorish character.

jumped out and fell down into a meadow. After wandering about, she came upon an old palace in a state of decay. After entering, she couldn't find a soul. When she saw an old sofa, she threw herself on it, exhausted and upset, and fell asleep.

Now let's leave her sleeping there and go back to the father who had originally abandoned White Flower as a baby. This man had eventually learned from his wife that their baby wasn't really dead but had been given to a midwife, and no one knew what she had done with it. The man could find no peace of mind, and he finally said, "Dear wife, I am going in search of news of our daughter, and I won't be back until I find her."

Now we'll leave this father searching for his daughter and go back to the king, who, with the passage of time, was beginning to regret what he had done. "Who knows?" he was thinking, "Perhaps that knight tricked me and my wife is completely innocent? Who knows if she's alive or dead? I'm going to leave this palace and not come back until I've had news of my wife!"

Now let's turn to the doctor, who was returning to his house and looking forward to seeing his little girl again.<sup>105</sup> He and his wife entered and called, but they saw no one. Then they went into the bedroom and found the little girl dead. The doctor was in a terrible state, and turned to the slave and said, "Ali, we are going to find that young woman wherever she is and kill the wicked creature, just as she murdered our daughter!"

They set out walking, came to a palace, and went in. There they found two men sitting and resting, and since they were quite tired themselves, they sat down alongside them. Now in the middle of this room there was a lantern burning. As the four of them sat in silence, a little oil flask came into the room, went up to the lantern, and said, "Lantern, come down to me." The lantern came down, and the flask poured some oil into it. Then the flask said to the lantern,

"Don't you have any stories to tell me?"

"Why should I keep telling you stories? But I do have something interesting to tell."

"Tell it, then."

"Listen to this," said the lantern. "There was once a father who didn't want any more female children. So he told his wife that if she had another baby girl he would kill it. The mother avoided this by giving the baby away. Now listen further: when this baby grew up, she became the wife of the king, but the king was tricked by a knight, took his wife to Mount Pellegrino, wounded her, and

105 Pitre's text here adds "and the little girl's mother," obviously a mistake on the part of the storyteller, who may have meant to refer to the little girl's "nanny."

left her lying on the ground. A doctor happened to go there and heard someone groaning. (At this point three of the persons seated were looking at one another in astonishment, while Ali began trembling like a blackbird in a trap.) Listen further: this doctor and his wife went to the spot where they heard the groans, and what did they find but a very beautiful young woman lying on the ground wounded. They took her home with them and entrusted their baby girl to her, and the baby was murdered by the slave because he hated the young woman so much."

Then the oil flask said, "Oh, that poor young woman! And is she alive or dead now?"

"She's alive."

"And where can she be found, poor thing?"

"She's right here, inside, resting on a couch. Her father is looking for her, the king is looking for her, and the doctor is looking for her. The doctor wants to kill her because he thinks she murdered his child."

On hearing all this, the three of them sprang up. The doctor grabbed hold of Ali so he couldn't escape. Then they went inside to where the young woman was sleeping, and all three threw themselves upon her.

"She belongs to me, she's my daughter!" exclaimed the father.

"She belongs to me," said the doctor, "because I saved her life!"

"Even though I betrayed her, she's my wife, and she belongs to me!" said the king.


Then they took hold of Ali and cut him into four pieces.

At last the father and the doctor came to their senses, and the king invited them to the palace for a great celebration. He was delighted to have his wife back again, and he accepted her father and the doctor as family members.

So they lived on in contentment and peace,  
While we simply sit here, cleaning our teeth.

*Collected in Palermo by Pardi.*

## 74. THE KING OF SPAIN AND THE ENGLISH LORD

nce upon a time there was a king and queen who had only one son. When he reached the age of eighteen, his father said to him, "My son, time is passing, and you're getting older. Why don't you get married? If we were to die, who would inherit the kingdom?"

However, the son did not feel the same way and repeatedly told the king, "It's not time, father."

And the father would constantly answer, "Get married, my son."

Finally, to relieve himself of the pressure, he said, "Father, you can be sure that I'll only marry when I've found a maiden as white as ricotta and as red as a rose."

Upon hearing this, the king rang the bell for his councilors.

"Gentlemen, the prince has agreed to marry, but he wants a maiden as white as ricotta and as red as a rose. How can we find one?"

"Your majesty," the wise men responded, "gather together some of the courtiers, and send each one out with a painter and as many servants as necessary, and have them search the entire world for this maiden. At the end of a year, your son will marry the most beautiful maiden."

So the courtiers departed, each with a painter of masterpieces and with as many servants as they desired. Each went to a different kingdom. One of the councilors went to Spain. Once he arrived there, he entered a shop and began to chat. You know how it is after a few days in a new place and you begin to make friends. Well, the shopkeeper turned to him one day and said, "So, tell me why you've come here?"

"We've come here," said the courtier, "to find a maiden as white as ricotta and as red as a rose. We're searching for this maiden because our prince wants to marry her."

"Oh! If that's the reason, well, there's a rare beauty here, a maiden who really is white as ricotta and red as a rose. But it's difficult to see her because this maiden never shows herself. She's the daughter of a family that's fallen in disgrace, and nobody is allowed to see her face."

"Well then how can we see her?"

"Let me take care of it."

The shopkeeper went to the mother of this maiden and said to her, "My lady, there's a painter in my shop who is going about and painting the best faces in the world. He'd like to paint a portrait of your daughter. If you agree, he'll pay you forty gold coins."

The mother, who was in dire straits, told this to her daughter, and her daughter was persuaded. So, the painter, the courtier (because this was part of the agreement), and the shopkeeper entered the house. When the painter saw her, he said, "She really is beautiful!"

And he began to paint her portrait. When he was done, he left and took a room in the house of the shopkeeper until he finished touching up the beautiful portrait. Meanwhile, the courtier went to a silversmith and had a gold frame made for the portrait. Then he had it attached to his back and got ready to depart for the kingdom with the painter.

“Farewell,” they said to the shopkeeper. “Let’s hope that things will not end here.”

A year passed, and it was time for the prince to have an audience and look at the portraits. At the very end, the councilor stood up and said, “Your majesty, if this portrait doesn’t please you, you’ll never find the maiden you desire.”

“Oh! What a beautiful painting!” the prince said. “If the face is similar to this portrait, it’s a grand visage.”

Immediately he had an array of twelve dresses brought, gave them to the courtier, and sent him to Spain in the best coach from the palace to fetch this maiden. The first thing the councilor did when they arrived was to go to the shopkeeper, who was very happy to see him. Then they went to the mother of the maiden.

“My lady,” said the shopkeeper, “your daughter is to marry the prince from this courtier’s kingdom. Your daughter deserves this good fortune. She’s pious, and you have educated her well. But do you know what you have to do now? You must send your daughter to the palace that the prince has made for her to study and learn all languages.”

Upon hearing this, tears began to appear in the mother’s eyes out of tenderness. Her daughter, who was obedient, went to the palace and began studying. Since she was intelligent, she learned everything she was expected to learn at the end of four months. When she left this palace, she married the prince by proxy in front of the courtier from the prince’s kingdom. The shopkeeper was then handsomely rewarded.

When he received advance notice of their approach, the prince mounted his horse and rode to meet his fiancée. As soon as he saw the young woman, he dismounted and got into the coach with the princess. Imagine the joy! When his mother saw her, she was quite pleased. She felt extraordinarily drawn to her and took her son aside and whispered in his ear, “My son, you’ve got all that you desired. I like this maiden. There’s a particular purity in her eyes.”

Certainly those were wise words!

Incidentally, this queen had another older son, who was the emperor of Brazil, but since he was far away, they never talked about him.

The princess led the life of a saint. She was always in her room and never stuck her head outside. Her mother-in-law loved her very much, and they were like doves together. This is a rare thing because mothers-in-laws and daughters-in-law usually cause the heavens to collapse with their quarrels. In this case the devil kept trying to intervene and humiliate them, and one day he caused the mother-in-law to say, “My daughter, why do you always shut yourself up like this? Get a bit of fresh air by the open window.”

Since the princess always did what her mother-in-law asked, she went the window. But, as she was looking out the window, an English lord happened to pass by. Now this lord looked up toward the window, and once he saw the princess, he could not take his eyes off her. In fact, he refused to move on and began to pace back and forth on the little square in front of the palace so that he could catch a glance of her. Days passed, and one time, an old woman approached him for some alms.

"Get out of here, you ugly old hag! Let me be!"

"What's wrong with you?" the old woman said to him.

"Get out of here. I'm not going to tell you."

"Who knows what might happen if your lordship tells me!"

"There's nothing to tell! I want to see the princess, and I can't."

"And this is why your lordship is upset? You only have to give me a diamond ring, and I'll take care of things for you."

The lord trusted her and bought her a ring, and the old woman went straight to the palace.

"Where are you going?" the guard said.

"I've got a ring that's worth a great deal, and the only one who can afford to buy it from me is the princess. So I'm going to the princess."

They sent a messenger to the princess, who had the old woman admitted into the palace. When the princess saw the ring, she said, "How much do you want for it?"

"Three hundred gold coins, your majesty."

"Quick, pay this old woman three hundred gold coins, and give her ten more as a reward."

The old woman was content and returned to the English lord.

"What did the princess say to you?" the English lord asked.

"She said that she'd give me a response in ten days."

And she kept the three hundred gold coins. At the end of ten days the old woman said to the English lord.

"I'm supposed to go to the princess, but how can I do this when my hands are empty? Do you know what you must do? You must send her a necklace worth a great deal of money."

Well, as you know, lords are kings without crowns. So he ordered a valuable necklace, and the old woman took it to the princess and told her that she wanted to sell this necklace. When the princess saw it, she said, "It's beautiful. How much must I pay you?"

"Because it's you, your majesty, I'll charge only a thousand gold coins."

After the old woman took the money, she ran to the English lord.

"What did the princess say to you?"

“Nothing,” she said. “The mother-in-law was there, and she couldn’t talk to me. But she took the gift. Next week everything will be done.”

“And what gift can I send to her next week?”

“Listen, I’ve already brought her a ring and a necklace as well. Now it would be good if I brought her a beautiful dress.”

For the following week the English lord had the most beautiful dress ever seen prepared for the princess, and he gave it to the old woman, who went and entered the princess’s room.

“Your majesty, I’m selling this dress. Do you want to buy it?”

“How magnificent! How much do you want for it?”

“Five hundred gold coins.”

“Give her five hundred gold coins,” the princess said, “and twenty more for a reward.”

“What did she say to you?” the English lord asked.

“She wants you to organize a grand ball at your palace, and you’re to invite the prince and princess. Then you’ll get what you want.”

(Just look at how cunningly this old woman plots things!)

The English lord was very content and made great preparations. Then he sent an invitation to the prince. When the time came, the princess put on the dress that she had bought from the old woman along with the ring and necklace and went to the ball with the prince. At the very first dance the English lord went to the princess and invited her to dance because he was convinced she would accept. However, when she saw him behaving in such a forward way, she left him like a numskull and went to sit down next to her husband. She continued to do this each time the lord came and invited her. When the ball was over, the prince said farewell to the English lord and left with his wife. In the end, let’s just say, the English lord was sorely confused.

“At least,” he said, “she did wear the ring, necklace, and dress that I gave her. But she wouldn’t dance with me. What am I to make out of this?”

In those days the nobility customarily dressed up as peasants and went from café to café to hear what the people were saying. Well, who do you think came across one another in one of those cafés? The prince happened to meet the English lord, who said to him, “Tell me, have you seen that slut of a princess? First she took my ring, then my necklace, and finally my dress that cost me tons of money, and at the ball that I threw, she didn’t want to exchange one word with me.”

When the prince heard all this—one thing led to the next—he ran to his palace, pulled out his sword, and rushed to kill his wife. His mother bravely intervened and woke her daughter-in-law in advance. But the prince was not content and summoned a captain to take her out to sea in a boat.

"Take this whore," he said—actually I don't recall her name anymore—"Take her out to sea, and when you're there, kill her, cut out her tongue, and bring it back to me!"

The captain took the unfortunate princess and departed. The mother-in-law was very anxious about her daughter-in-law but didn't have the courage to say anything. They separated. And everyone who heard about this affair began to weep.

Fortunately, the captain had a dog aboard the ship. So he had the dog killed, cut out the tongue, and put it into salt. After sailing a long way the ship touched land, and the captain left the poor princess with a great deal of provisions. Then he continued his voyage, while she stayed there and took refuge in a cave. Time passed, and the poor princess's provisions came to an end. One day a vessel passed by, and she signaled the ship. Fortunately, the captain of this ship saw her signals.

"Come closer," she cried out.

The ship approached.

"What are you doing there, my lady?"

"I'm here, captain, because I was traveling on a ship, and the ship sank. I'm the only one who managed to survive."

The captain took her on board, and they continued sailing. Then he said to her, "Where would you like me to take you?"

"If possible, to Brazil. I have some relatives there."

So they set sail for Brazil, and before they arrived, she said, "Captain, I would appreciate another favor from you. I want to be dressed like a man because I don't want my relatives to recognize me."

The captain had her dressed as a man, and they cut her hair. Since she was so beautiful, she looked like a real handsome cavalier. After disembarking, she began to walk about and saw a lawyer's office.

"Could you use a clerk?" she said to the lawyer.

"Why not?" said the lawyer, and he hired her.

The first work that the lawyer gave her to do she finished in a moment, and the lawyer was astounded. Then she did some more work that was more difficult than the first, and the same thing happened. In short, the lawyer came to admire this young man who seemed to perform magic. And so he began to give her twelve gold coins per day.

Now this lawyer had a daughter, and he thought, "I'd like this young man to marry my daughter."

So he told this to the young man, but can you combine wood with wood?

"I'd like to put this off for the time being," the young man said to the lawyer. "Let me earn a bit more money, and then I'll marry her with pleasure."

The fame of this young man spread by word of mouth until he was summoned by the royal secretary. When the young man presented himself, the secretary gave him something to copy, and the sheet of paper was finished in no time. Now, who do you think got wind of this young clerk's talents? The emperor, of course, and he was her brother-in-law.

"Have this young man appear here," the emperor said.

When the emperor saw him, he paid the young man great compliments and took him on as his page. As soon as he began working at the palace, the emperor became very fond of him.

But let's leave the emperor for now and turn to the prince, whose great fury had passed, and he came to regret what he had done.

"What if she was innocent? Ahh! My wife, I've lost you! What's become of you? Ahh! What a great fool I've been!"

He continued saying things like this and slowly became insane. At this point the queen mother sat down and wrote a letter to her other son, the emperor of Brazil, telling him that his brother had become insane, and the people were about to rebel. "You must come and spend some time here to help," she wrote.

When the letter arrived at the court in Brazil, the emperor began to weep.

"Page, will you go to my brother's kingdom? I'll give you *carte blanche*."

The page said yes and took many servants with him and departed in two beautiful ships. It was a long journey, and after some time, they arrived.

"The viceroy's arrived! The viceroy's arrived!" the people shouted.

The canons fired a salvo, and once the viceroy disembarked, the queen went to greet him and bestowed upon him all the honors of the kingdom as if he had been her son in person.

"I am at your service, your majesty," the viceroy said.

"Welcome, viceroy," the queen responded.

"Your majesty," the viceroy said, "before thinking about doing anything else, let us attend to the affairs of your people."

And he began to take care of all the things that had been neglected, and the people were fully content with this viceroy. Then, one day the viceroy said to the queen, "Your majesty, could you now tell me the story of how you came to lose your daughter-in-law?"

The queen recounted everything from the beginning to the end—about the English lord, the meeting at the café, the departure of her daughter-in-law, everything. As she told the story, her eyes filled with tears.

"That's enough for now," the viceroy said. "I'll think about what we should do. In the meantime, let's send for the lord who was the cause of these unfortunate events."

Soon the lord arrived and said, "I am here for an audience."

When the viceroy saw him, he said, "Justice will be done here. So, I want you to tell me about your relationship with the princess."

The lord related everything that had happened without omitting anything.

"So, my lord, as I understand it, you never talked to the princess," said the viceroy.

"Never."

"And the things you gave to her, did you give them to her personally?"

"No, the old woman did that."

The queen and her son the prince were nearby, and they were astonished to hear this.

"And this old woman who did these favors for you, is she alive or dead?" the viceroy asked.

"She might still be alive."

"Well then, lock up the lord in that room over there," the viceroy commanded the servants, and then he sent for the old woman. Soon the police found her and brought her to the palace.

"Tell me, good woman, I want to know all about those things that you sold to the princess."

And the old woman spilled out all she knew from the beginning to the end.

"And tell me, old woman, did you ever deliver a message to the princess?"

"Never."

Upon hearing this, the prince regained his senses and cried out, "Ah! My poor wife, you died innocent! You died innocent!"

"Be quiet, your majesty! Perhaps there's a remedy to all this," the viceroy said to the prince.

"What remedy could there be? The princess is dead," he responded. "Ahh! My wife, I've lost you forever!"

The viceroy excused herself and disappeared into a room where she dressed herself as the princess she really was. Then she let her long hair that was tied in a bun flow again and went back to the grand parlor and presented herself to her mother-in-law, the prince, and everyone else. When the queen saw her, she asked, "Who are you?"

"What? You don't recognize me? I am your daughter-in-law, the wife of the prince."

What more do you want to hear? The king regained his senses. He embraced her and showered her with kisses and wrapped his arms around her. Then he sentenced the old woman to be burned at the stake and the English lord to be guillotined. And the sentences were carried out immediately.

The queen mother wrote to her son the emperor of Brazil and told him


about everything that had happened, and he told his children: “Imagine, my page was a woman! My secretary was a woman! She was my sister-in-law, and I didn’t know a thing about it!”

Finally, they called the captain who had saved the princess and appointed him a councilor of the court, and all the sailors were given a big promotion. So,

they all remained happy and enjoyed their peace  
While we sit here and pick our teeth.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 75. THE JEWEL-STUDDED BOOT

nce upon a time there was a rich merchant who had two children, a boy and a girl. They were the apple of his eye,<sup>106</sup> and their mother loved them just as much.

Well, after some time, their mother fell seriously ill, and the good Lord took her, leaving only the father to raise them. He sent his son to study, and the young fellow turned out to have an exceptionally quick mind.<sup>107</sup> With the passage of time the merchant also grew ill and died, and the young man and his sister were left alone together, held by a strong bond of affection.<sup>108</sup>

Now it so happened that this very talented youth showed up at the royal court of Portugal, and the king took him on as his secretary, to do all his correspondence. Some letters from his hand reached the King of Spain, and when he saw them, he exclaimed, “Oh, what a beautiful script! A man with such elegant handwriting would be ideal for my court.” And so he wrote to the King of Portugal, “I have read your letters and am dazzled by your secretary’s beautiful handwriting. If you don’t mind, I request that you send him here to serve as my secretary.”

Now it is the custom of such kings to grant each other favors, so the King of Portugal summoned his secretary and, despite his reluctance to part with him, told him that he was sending him elsewhere.

106 The Sicilian idiom is more vivid: “he loved them like the pupil of his eyes,” *vulia bèniri a sti figghi quantu la pupidda di l’occhi soi*.

107 The Sicilian idiom is “he could pluck birds from the air,” *pigghiava occeddi pi l’aria*.

108 Here the Sicilian has an unusual idiom, “they loved one another like the little bit of water,” *si vulianu bèniri comu la poc’ acqua*.

"But your Majesty, what about my sister?" the young man replied. "There's no one I can leave her with."

"Don Giuseppe," the king replied (for that was the young man's name), "I really can't help you with this. But why don't you leave your sister in the hands of the housekeeper? Since your sister is a well-behaved young maiden, she will keep to herself, and that will allow you to sleep in peace."<sup>109</sup>

The young fellow had no choice but to go home and break the news to his sister.

"Dear sister of mine," he said, "this is the way things stand. I must go away and serve the King of Spain who wants me for his secretary. You'll remain here with the housekeeper. Once I'm settled in Spain, I'll send for you, and you'll come join me there."

Well, you can imagine the weeping and wailing! But finally her brother consoled her by saying, "Look, here's what we can do. We'll have our portraits made, and I'll take yours with me, and you'll keep mine."

And that's what they did. The brother left, and the sister remained alone in the palace in the care of the housekeeper. She had no lack of money, jewelry, and precious stones of all kinds, and so she lived well enough.

Meanwhile her brother, Don Giuseppe, arrived at the Spanish court, and the king received him with all honors. He was thrilled to have this young man as his secretary and immediately put him to work writing. The King of Spain took such a liking to this youth that he began using him for every need that arose within his kingdom. "Don Giuseppe, you take care of it . . . You're there, so why don't you see to it? . . . I have full confidence that you will do it perfectly."

Well, the court dignitaries couldn't stand this state of affairs. All of them—the squires, the former secretary, the knights—became incredibly jealous of this young man and began looking for some way to destroy his reputation.

Now, Don Giuseppe would correspond regularly with his sister, and whenever he missed her sorely, he would take out her picture and look at it over and over, and a tear would run down his cheek. One of the jealous squires saw him doing this, and used it as pretext for denouncing him to the king.

"Well, your Majesty, you should take a better look at Don Giuseppe whose virtues you never stop praising! You think he's a fine fellow, but who knows who he might be consorting with, this young man that you are so crazy about?!"

109 Again an unusual idiom, "you'll be able to sleep with your hand at your cheek," *vui putiti d'ormiri cu' la manu a la mascidda*. Pitriè glosses with the Italian idiom "you'll be able to sleep with your head between two pillows."

“And what exactly is he doing?”

“Doing? Why, he keeps looking at a picture and kissing it and crying. And then he hides it.”

So the king decided he must see the picture, and one day he came upon Don Giuseppe unexpectedly when the youth was kissing the picture and crying.

“Bravo, young fellow. And just who is this woman that you’re kissing?”

“It’s my sister, your Majesty.”

The king looked at the picture and saw a beautiful maiden, the loveliest he had ever seen. He wanted to know all about her, and Don Giuseppe spoke in great detail about all her excellent qualities, going on and on about her.<sup>110</sup> Now that scoundrel of a squire came upon the scene, and he was the sort of person who likes to poke his finger in someone’s eyes, as the saying goes.<sup>111</sup> So he looked at the picture and said,

“This woman? I know her all too well—in fact, I’ve had relations with her.”

“My sister? You’ve had relations with my sister? My sister who has never left her house or been seen by anyone?”

“Yes, with your sister!”

“You’re a liar!”

“I’m telling the truth.”

“No, you’re a liar!”

“No, I’m telling the truth!”

“Stop!” said the king. “Here’s how we’ll settle the question. If it’s true,” he said to the squire, “that you’ve compromised Don Giuseppe’s sister, I want you to bring me some evidence within one month. If you can prove it, Don Giuseppe will have his head chopped off. If you’re lying, it’s your head that will be chopped off.”

A king’s command must always be obeyed. The squire left and went straight to Palermo to seek the evidence he needed. He learned all he could about this young woman and found out that she was a rare beauty but could never be seen, because her windows were always shut. Time kept passing, and the squire was beginning to lose his wits thinking that his head would soon be on the chopping block.

One evening he was so distraught that he felt he could sell his soul to the devil. With his hat in hand and his hair disheveled, he was crying out, “Whatever am I to do?” when an old woman saw him.

110 Another vivid idiom in Sicilian: “(he spoke) frothing at the mouth,” *facènnuni la scuma a la vucca*.

111 *Jiri cu li jidita 'nta l'occhi a unu*. Pitрэ explains this idiom describes a hostile person who tries to ruin other people.

"Some charity, good squire," she said. "I'm dying of hunger."

"Leave me alone, you devil of a crone!"

"Charity, please, and don't think I can't help you."

"What help could *you* possibly offer *me*?"

"Just tell me your problem and I'll help you."

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Nothing. If your lordship will just confide in me, you'll see what help I can provide." So the squire decided to tell her his whole story.

"Oh," she said when he had finished, "is that all? This is really no problem. Just leave everything to me, and the evidence is as good as in your pocket."

"If you can do this for me," he said, "you'll be richly rewarded."

Well, that night the weather was terrible. There was a drenching downpour. The old woman went to the maiden's door, shivering with the cold, and she cried out so piteously it would tear your heart out. And it was thundering and flashing so much lightning as to scare the wits out of anybody. When Don Giuseppe's sister heard all the weeping and lamenting, she said, "Oh, the poor old woman! Do let her come in, and be sure to lock the door behind her."

So the servants opened the door and found her shivering on the doorstep.

"Oh, please, for mercy's sake," she said, her teeth chattering, "please let me in, I'm dying from the cold!"

The maiden heard her and ordered them to bring her inside, and in the goodness of her heart offered her something to eat, while the old woman kept up the pretence of shivering with the cold. In a clever and calculated way she managed to observe the layout of the rooms and noted which one was the young woman's bedroom.

Well, the terrible weather made a short evening of it, and Don Giuseppe's sister went to bed, as did the other members of the household. When the old woman was sure they were all asleep, she went into the maiden's room, lifted the covers from her, and studied her body from head to toe. She noticed that on her right shoulder she had three little hairs like fine threads of gold. She took a little scissors and snipped them off, wrapped them in a handkerchief, very carefully re-adjusted the covers, and tiptoed back to her own place. Then she began moaning again and making her teeth chatter, crying out, "Brrrrrrr, how can anyone stay in this place? Open the door and let me out! I can't breathe in here!"

The poor young woman woke up, heard all this commotion, and told the housekeeper to let the old woman out. Once outside she found the squire wandering around the palace grounds and gave him the three hairs. He was out of his mind with joy, gave her a handsome reward, and was off in a

flash.<sup>112</sup> The next morning he took a ship to Spain and went immediately to the king.

“Your Majesty, here is the evidence incriminating Don Giuseppe’s sister.”

The king was amazed and summoned Don Giuseppe.

“Don Giuseppe,” he announced, “you’ve lost the wager, and here’s the evidence: three golden hairs from your sister’s right shoulder.”

“Oh, my poor sister!” exclaimed Don Giuseppe.

“Now,” said the king, “you have six months time to clear yourself before having your head chopped off.”

Then two guards came, and with one on each side of him he was hauled off to prison, where he was given only a crust of bread and a glass of water each day.

Now, let’s leave him there in prison and go back to his sister. When she stopped receiving letters from her brother, she became totally distraught.

“Whatever could have happened to him?” she was wondering. “I haven’t received one single word from him.”

Now let’s go to the jailor who brought Don Giuseppe his daily bread and water. He was a kind fellow and was so taken with the young man’s fine character that he had begun slipping him his own food in secret. Well, time flies quickly in a tale, and four months had already gone by without Don Giuseppe having any letters from his sister. So one day he said to the jailor,

“Would you do me a favor? If I write a few words to my sister, will you send the letter for me?”

“Of course,” replied the man, “go ahead and write it.”

So Don Giuseppe wrote and described the whole situation and told her that he was going to have his head chopped off because of her. Then the jailor sent the letter.

When his sister received his letter, she cried out, “Oh, goodness me! My poor brother! How could this disaster have fallen on us?”<sup>113</sup>

Then she put her mind to it and came up with the following plan. First, she sold her house and land and all her possessions so she could raise a large sum of money. With this money she bought the finest jewels and took them to a master craftsman and said, “Make me a handsome boot, and on it I want you to sew all my jewels.”

Then she bought herself a fine outfit all in black just like people wear who are in mourning, and off she went to Spain on a boat.

112 The idiom in the original is unusual, “he didn’t have hand or foot,” *manu e pedi nun appi*, suggesting movement faster than the human norm.

113 Here the idiom is, “why this great fire in my house?” *comu stu focu granni ’nta la mè casa?*

Well, the final two months of her brother's sentence had passed, and as soon as she disembarked she heard the sound of trumpets. All at once she saw some soldiers marching along with a bound prisoner on his way to his execution. There she was, dressed in her grand black outfit with one foot showing only a stocking and the other foot wearing the jewel-studded boot. Indeed, she was an impressive sight to behold!

"Please, your Majesty, a favor, I beg you!" she shouted as she ran forward into the crowd.

The whole crowd was astonished to see this woman, and they made way for her. The king heard her shouts, he ordered his soldiers to stop.

"What's the matter?" he called out to the young woman.

"Mercy, your Majesty, mercy and justice!"

The king was struck by her beauty and replied,

"Your request is granted. Speak."

"Your Majesty," she said, "your squire first enjoyed my favors and then stole my boot, the mate to this one!" And she displayed the boot all studded with diamonds and precious jewels.

The king looked at the boot in amazement, then turned to his squire and said,

"So, you actually did this: you enjoyed this lady's favors and then stole her boot? Aren't you ashamed to be in my presence?"

"But your Majesty, I've never seen this woman before!"

"What?" she retorted. "You've never seen me? Then how is it that you boasted that you had relations with me? I am Don Giuseppe's sister."

The squire was at a loss for words. "Your Majesty," he began . . . and then he had no choice but to reveal the entire truth.<sup>114</sup>

When the king realized that Don Giuseppe's sister had never had relations with the squire, he had the guards free him and bring him to his side. When the young man was there and saw his sister, he threw his arms around her and clung to her neck, and they shed many tears. As for the squire, the king had him seized and bound.

"Off with his head!" he shouted, and they executed him on the spot.

So the king brought the brother and sister with him to his palace and was so taken with the young woman's beauty and virtue that he decided to marry her.

114 The Sicilian is much more vivid: "the squire did the death he had to do," *fici la morti chi appi a fari*, meaning he was forced to betray himself.

So they lived on, in contentment and peace,  
While we just sit here, picking our teeth.

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 76. THE LEFT HAND SQUIRE

Once upon a time, so the story goes, there was a King of Spain, who had one squire for his left side and another for his right side.<sup>115</sup> The left hand squire was married to a woman who, if you discounted human imperfections, was the very portrait of a Madonna because of her beauty, grace, and modesty. The right hand squire, during all his time at court, had never been able to get a look at her face, and was beginning to feel indignant about this. So one day he turned to the king and said, “Your Majesty, if only you knew what an extraordinarily beautiful wife your left hand squire has! She’s really something to look at!”

Another time he said, “Your Majesty, this morning I saw your squire’s wife, and what a beauty she is!” And still another time, “Do you know, your Majesty, that your left hand squire’s wife is growing more beautiful day by day?”

Well, the king wasn’t made of wood, and provoked as he was day after day, he finally had an overwhelming curiosity to have a look at this rare beauty. So he mounted his horse and rode with his knights past the home of his left hand squire. It happened at that very moment that the woman was standing at her window. The king’s heart skipped a beat at the sight of her. But because he was the king he couldn’t just stop there and keep looking at the window—people might talk—so he had to continue on and then ride back again. But when he passed a second time, the woman had gone in (she wasn’t the sort who liked to display herself). The king couldn’t contain himself and rushed back to the palace with the following plan: He gave the order that no one could leave until he himself returned. In this way, he could pay the lady a visit while her husband was confined to the royal palace, and then come back.

So he dressed himself like a soldier and went to his left hand squire’s house and rang the bell.

“What do you want?” asked the maid.

115 The Sicilian and Italian word for “squire” is *bracciere*, from the word for arm, *braccio*. It literally denotes the man who offers his arm for support, and in a looser sense a cavalier or squire serving at court. This function of offering the arm leads to the amusing idea that a king could have a squire for both his left and right hand sides.

"I want to speak with your mistress."

"What business do you have with her?"

"I simply need to speak with her."

"I'm sorry, but my mistress is resting and cannot receive visitors."

"I insist on coming in."

"You simply cannot!"

Their words grew more heated until finally the maid gave him a shove and was about to close the door in his face when the king reached beneath his soldier's outfit and brought forth the royal fleece. The maid fell to her knees and begged him to pardon her for not having recognized him.

"Have no fear," said the king. "I'm glad to see that you are a faithful servant. Now just allow me to have a look at the princess's face, and then I'll be on my way."

"Of course, your Majesty."

And she led him very quietly to where the lady was resting. She happened to be in a deep sleep, and since a woman's face becomes rosier when she is sleeping, her appearance took the king's breath away. He took off one of his gloves and left it on top of the bed canopy, looked at her intently for a while, and then abruptly turned around and left.

As soon as he was back at the palace, all the knights and courtiers were free to leave, and the left hand squire went home to see his wife. He entered her room, and what did he see but that ill-fated glove that the king had left on the canopy. That glove performed the devil's work. From that day on, the squire no longer looked at his wife. The poor woman, as innocent as the Virgin Mary herself, could not understand the meaning of this altered behavior, and so began to grow thin from worry and loneliness, although she didn't complain aloud. Her maid was concerned and said to her, "My lady, what sort of melancholy are you suffering, that you never go out to the theater or any other entertainment, while all the other ladies go flaunting themselves in public on every possible occasion? Well, you can take comfort in the old sayings, 'Good times and bad times don't last for all time,' and 'The truth, like oil, always comes to the surface.'"<sup>116</sup>

Now, one day the right hand squire happened to be passing the home of the left hand squire, looked up at the window, and thought he was seeing a ghost. Who was it but the poor princess, who had gone from bad to worse and was so wasted away she was as thin as a candle. He was moved to pity at the sight and went straight to the king.

"Do you recall, your Majesty, how exceptionally beautiful the princess

116 *Bon tempu e malu tempu non dura sempri un tempu*, and *La virità va 'nsumma comu l'ogghiu*.

was who was married to the left hand squire? Well, you wouldn't recognize her now. The poor thing is all pale and wasted away."

The king pondered this for a while and then struck his brow, saying, "Oh my, have I done something to cause this?"

Two days later, he ordered a court banquet to be held, and every courtier had to attend accompanied by his wife, his sister, or some other lady. The left hand squire had no sister, so he had to bring his wife.

"Tell my wife to purchase the best dress she can find," he said to the maid. "Tell her to spare no expense because in a few days we must attend a banquet at court."

The lady couldn't believe that her husband was making such a generous offer, and her spirits rose as the festive occasion approached. When the day finally arrived, they went to the palace, and the squire and his wife took their places at the left side of the king. The best of delicacies were served, with the best wines in the kingdom, fine silver cutlery, and music and song that were a delight to the ear. At the conclusion of the feast the king announced, "Now I wish to hear from each of you gentlemen and ladies who honor me with your presence at this table. Tell me something about your life."

So the right hand squire spoke of his life experience and said that he had always enjoyed blessed peace with his wife. "And you, my lady," said the king addressing the man's wife, "how has your life been with my valiant squire?"

"It's been very good," she replied.

And thus the king went on from one guest to another, and each in turn recounted something about themselves. Now the only two who hadn't spoken were the left hand squire and his wife. He addressed the wife first and asked,

"And for you, lady princess, how has your life been?"

The poor woman remained unperturbed, and answered with true grace and in rhyme:

"A vine I was, and vine I still remain;  
I was held in esteem, but am now held in disdain.  
Without cause and for no reason  
My charms have fallen out of season."

Her husband then replied, answering point for point:

"A vine you were, and vine you still remain;  
You were held in esteem, but are now held in disdain.  
It was your canopy I cast my eye on,  
And there I beheld the glove of my Lion.  
Therefore your charms I cannot rely on."

The king read the riddle correctly: she was the vine, abandoned by her husband because he found the glove on the canopy. He realized that it was his own curiosity that had caused this harm, and he immediately replied,

“About this vine which you describe,  
 God will stand witness at my side:  
 The tender shoot from off this vine,  
 Was never plucked by hand of mine.  
 And this I will swear by the crown that I wear!”

Now, an oath sworn on his crown is the most powerful oath a king can utter, and so the squire was struck speechless. And still, he couldn't bring himself to believe that his wife was innocent. So after the banquet the king sat down alongside the two of them, and in private he explained how his glove had been left on the canopy. He concluded by saying,

“I thoroughly admire the loyalty of your maid, and the honesty of this good woman who has never looked at any man other than her husband. It is you two who have to pardon me, who was the cause of your unhappiness and your pain.”

So they remained in blessed peace,  
 While we sit here and clean our teeth.

*Collected in Palermo from a woman who heard it from Agatuzza Messina.*

## 77. THE GREAT NARBUNI

**L**et me tell you a tale, good gentlemen, about a king who lived once upon a time, and he had a son who wanted to marry. So the king sent painters to every country to make portraits of the prettiest faces of the maidens from all social classes. The first painter brought back the portrait of a laundress's daughter, a maiden of rare beauty. “She's the one I want!” exclaimed the prince when he saw the portrait. And so he went off with a few servants and some soldiers and found the town where the young woman lived.

He came upon her carrying a bundle of laundry on her head, as she was returning from washing clothes. Then he quickly knocked the bundle off, picked up the maiden, who was in tears, and carried her to her father.

“You can see,” he said to her father, “that I want your daughter for a wife. I like her looks.”

The father was put off by his manner and replied, "Go play your own foolish games with your own kind, and leave us ordinary folk alone."

"On my word of honor," the prince responded, "I really do want to marry your daughter, and I'll give you a generous income that will allow you to live like a pope."

Upon saying this, he gave the father a large payment, had the maiden dress up in finery fit for a queen, and they left. The king and queen met them with a boat and took them to the royal palace, where they summoned the archpriest to be introduced to the betrothed couple. Then they announced the marriage banns, completed the bride's wardrobe, and the wedding took place. There was a week of feasting and dancing, and then the newlyweds took up residence in their rooms in the palace, very much in love.

Now let's leave these two and turn to the king, who had declared war against the King of Africa. The prince had to leave his young wife under his father's protection, and go off to defend his country. After he fought his first battle, he emerged the victor. Now we can leave him right there and go back to his wife.

She was having problems with the king's minister, who had lost his head over her. He took advantage of his first opportunity to be close to her and began making advances, but she gave him such a whack that it sent him flying backwards. The scorned minister got back at her by running to denounce her to the king.

"Your majesty, you should be aware that your daughter-in-law is carrying on with the cook and with other people as well."

The king wrote to his son, informing him about his wife's behavior, and the prince answered, "Feel free to deal with her as you wish."

So the king summoned the minister and showed him the letter.

"You see what my son has written. What punishment shall we devise for her?"

"My Lord," said the minister, "let's hand her over to two ruffians and tell them to take her into the woods and kill her."

So, that is what they did. Meanwhile, the princess had no inkling of what was going on, and only thought she was going for a walk in the woods. Consequently, she had dressed up with her finest jewels.

When they had gone a certain distance in to the woods, she said to the two men, "Where are we going?"

"Keep walking and don't talk," answered the first man, and he took out his knife and kept jabbing her to make her walk faster. When they reached a dark and isolated spot, they were ready to kill her.

"Why should you kill me?" asked the poor maiden. "Here are my jewels, just take them and let me live."

The two men were persuaded. So they left her in the woods and returned to the palace. The princess stayed there, unhappy and alone, but eventually met a goatherd. She acted very friendly and talked him into giving her his clothes, which she put on to look like a man, while she buried her own clothes near an oak tree. To be able to find the spot again she made a mark on the trunk of the oak. Then she proceeded on her way, and eventually met up with four robbers.

"Where are you going?" they asked.

"I'm running from some people who are tracking me down," she replied.

"But who are you?" they persisted.

"The Great Narbuni."

"Oh!" said the robbers. "We've heard all about you, and the many brave things you've done," and they invited her to join them in their cave. Soon after, twenty more robbers arrived, and when they heard that the Great Narbuni was there, they showed the utmost respect because they knew he was a person of great bravery.

At this moment a report came that twenty silversmiths were about to pass by.

"Who wants to take on this job and rob them?"

"I will go, and I'll need two men with me," answered Narbuni. So they appointed her their captain.

"Now, since you've done me the great honor of making me your captain," she said, "you must carry out my orders exactly, and sign a blood oath on it."

"Of course," said the robbers, and they got a paper and signed a blood oath to obey their captain. Then they went to ambush the silversmiths. When these men were attacked, they opened fire, but the robbers outnumbered them and had more guns, and the silversmiths were forced to flee, leaving behind twelve bundles of gold objects. (It was Narbuni who actually allowed them to make their escape.) The robbers collected the twelve bundles and brought them to their hiding place. "Hooray for the Great Narbuni!" they all shouted.

Meanwhile the prince had returned from the war. He shut himself in his rooms and did nothing but weep. Finally, the palace nobles went to him and said, "You shouldn't cry so much, dear prince, you might ruin your eyes. Why don't you come with us to have some fun in the countryside?"

The prince agreed, and the next day a few friends took him hunting in the countryside, far from the palace. Four robbers came upon them, captured them, and brought them to their cave. Then the Great Narbuni addressed them and said,

"You are the prince, are you not? Tell me, is the minister of your country still alive?"

"Yes, he is," answered the prince, terrified.

"I want you to write a letter to him at once," said Narbuni, "telling him to come to the Great Mountain." (The robbers' cave was just under this Great Mountain.)

So the letter was sent, and the minister was obliged to go to the mountain. The thieves were waiting for him, and after they seized him, they brought him to their cave. There the captain (the Great Narbuni) had a great table set and made them all sit down for a meal: the twenty-four robbers, the prince who made twenty-five, the minister who made twenty-six, the Great Narbuni who made twenty-seven—they all sat alongside the minister, and the prince's friends as well. Once they were all seated, the Great Narbuni spoke.

"Well now, my minister, tell us what happened with the prince's wife."

"I don't know," he answered and began to tremble.

"No, stop trembling and tell the prince the facts. What did you do to his wife?"

The minister still refused to speak, and so the Great Narbuni took a pistol and pointed it at him.

"Either you'll tell the truth, or I'll put a bullet through your skull!"

So the minister was forced to reveal the fact that he had tried to seduce the prince's wife.

"Your Majesty," said the Narbuni to the prince, "do you now understand the real facts about your wife?"

And she drew her knife, cut off the minister's head, and placed it in the center of the table.

"That, your Majesty, is how the wicked end up," she said.

Then, although her hands were covered with blood, she ordered everyone to eat while she had the minister's head thrown outside the cave.<sup>117</sup> As soon as they had all finished eating, she sent someone to get the bundle of clothes she had buried by the oak tree. She excused herself from the company and went into another cave to change back into her former dress. Then she presented herself to her husband as the princess she was. The prince burst into tears, and moved by tenderness, he asked her to forgive him for what he had done. Then she kindly thanked all the robbers, and all of them rode back to the palace, with the prince and princess in a carriage in the middle of the procession. Well, you can imagine what a celebration there was! Meanwhile, the

117 Pitre has a note characterizing this bloody act as an example of "the fierce revenge of Sicilian women."

robbers returned to their own countries much richer than before and no longer had to be robbers.

So their contentment never ends,  
And we stay here among our friends.

*Collected in Cianciana from master shoemaker Vincenzo Restivo by Gaetano di Giovanni.*

## 78. OLD MAN TRUTH

Once upon a time, so it's been told time and again, there was a king who owned some cattle. Among them was a calf that the king was completely crazy about, a calf more beautiful than words can tell. The king had named it "Golden Horn" and had entrusted this calf to a man he respected more than anyone. His nickname was "Old Man Truth," a perfect name for him because the king had never heard him utter a single lie, and he often invited him to the palace to hear news of his special calf, whose safety he had entrusted to Old Man Truth.

Well, one day the king happened to be talking with his ministers, and he began describing this old man, saying he was the kind of person who would rather have his head chopped off than utter a falsehood. Now the ministers knew all about Golden Horn, and two of them turned to the king and said,

"Your Majesty, how can you make such a claim? We'll make you a wager that before long this fellow that you call Old Man Truth will come and try to lie to you."

"You can wager what you want," replied the king, "but you'll see that this man is incapable of telling a lie, not now or at any time."

And so they made the wager. And then what did the two ministers do but dress up in women's clothes, like two fine ladies. The one who was the better looking padded his belly so as to look like a pregnant woman, while the other pretended to be an older relative who was accompanying her. They got into a fine carriage and drove to where Old Man Truth was keeping Golden Horn.

When they arrived, they dismounted and pretended to make the rounds of the place until they found Golden Horn. Old Man Truth, poor fellow, became anxious and disturbed when he saw the guests arrive. He began moving benches and arranging footstools so as to be able to receive these women hospitably. At this moment the one who was pregnant had a dizzy spell, fell down, and lay flat on the ground. The other looked upset and claimed that

this was a symptom of an illness the woman had had before, and she had no idea what to do to help her. Old Man Truth was completely at a loss, seeing the condition of the woman, and all he could say was, "My dear lady, I'll do anything to help. I'll even give my life!"

The older woman answered, "My good man, there is only one remedy: she needs to eat the meat of Golden Horn, the calf I saw as I was coming to your house."

So Old Man Truth, giving no thought any longer to how much this calf meant to the king, went out and slaughtered the animal and cooked some of its meat for the woman, and so—goodbye Golden Horn! As he approached with the meat, the woman on the ground heaved a great sigh and opened her eyes. Once she was revived, she began eating. Then they thanked the old man graciously, gave him a little gift, and took their leave.

At first, Old Man Truth felt happy that he had been able to restore life to the sick lady. But then it dawned on him that it was time to bring the king news of his calf. "What am I going to tell him?" he thought. "The first thing that he'll ask me is, 'How is Golden Horn?' And then what can I say?"

As he walked along the road to the palace, he kept rehearsing what he might say to the king. Whenever he passed a tree, he imagined it was the king, and he would say, "Your humble servant greets his mighty Majesty!" and the king would answer, "How are things, Old Man Truth, and how is Golden Horn?" Then he imagined himself answering, "Oh, your Majesty, I took him out to pasture, and a piece of the mountain came down on him and killed him." But then he thought it over and said, "No, never! I could never tell a lie like that to the king!" Then he met another tree and said, "Your humble servant greets his mighty Majesty!" And he imagined the king answering, "How are things, Old Man Truth? I trust that Golden Horn is well?" "Oh, your Majesty, Golden Horn had a sudden pain and he died." But then he thought, "No, this too is a lie." He came upon still another tree. "Your humble servant greets his mighty Majesty!" "How are you, Old Man Truth, and tell me about Golden Horn." "Your Majesty," he replied,

"A lady arrived, of high society.  
Her face was lovely, round and comely.  
With admiration I was filled,  
And Golden Horn I had to kill."

"Ah, yes!" he said to himself. "This is the truth that describes what really happened. The king may send me to my death for this, but I will have told him the truth." So when he arrived at the palace, he had calmed down, although inside he was still trembling like a blackbird.

"Your humble servant greets his mighty Majesty!"

"How are things, Old Man Truth? And what news do you bring of Golden Horn?"

"Your Majesty . . .

"A lady arrived, of high society.  
Her face was lovely, round and comely.  
With admiration I was filled,  
And Golden Horn I had to kill."

Well, the king had two reactions: on the one hand he was grieved when he heard about the death of his beloved calf, but on the other, he was delighted to have won the wager with his two ministers. So he summoned them and said, "Did you see that Old Man Truth is the very essence of truthfulness? I've won our wager."

At this point the two ministers had to admit that the king had been right all along. Now the king held Old Man Truth in higher esteem than ever before, and so did all the members of the royal court.

And whoever told this tale, and whoever had it told,  
No evil death will ever hold.

*Collected by Professor Carmelo Pardi in Palermo.*

## 79. THE KING OF NAPLES

Gentlemen, this fine tale has been told time and again.

There was once a king who went blind in both eyes. He went to a doctor for help, and the doctor said to him, "You have two sons, and if these sons love you well, they'll have to bring you the feather of the Hu."<sup>118</sup>

The father called his sons to him and asked, "Do you love me?"

"Of course, papa, we love you as much as our own eyes."

"Well then, you must find the feather of the Hu so my sight will be restored. Whoever brings it to me will inherit the kingdom."

"Your wish is our command, father. We shall set out right away so your sight will be restored."

<sup>118</sup> Pitрэ was not certain what *hu* meant except that it was some kind of a bird. He mentions that the narrator made an effort to pronounce the h. One time she said *gu* instead of *hu*, and Pitрэ thought that she might have meant *gru*, which means crane.

His sons took their leave. Two of them were both big and old, while their younger brother was little. They didn't want to take him with them, but because of the powers that be, they had to bring him along. After riding for some time, they entered a forest and at night rested beneath a tree, each taking a side with the youngest next to the smaller of the two. After the two older brothers fell asleep, the youngest remained awake. Toward midnight he heard the singing of the Hu. So he got up, took a shot, and hit it. Then he pulled out a feather and put it in a safe place.

When the sun rose the next morning, the brothers knew that he had somehow got the Hu's feather. Since they knew that their brother would now get their father's crown, they were overwhelmed by envy. So they grabbed the boy, killed him, and took the feather.

As soon as they returned home, they gave their father the feather of the Hu. The king stroked his eyes with the feather, and his sight was restored. When he could see, he asked, "Where's your brother?"

"Ah, papa, there was nothing we could do! When we went to sleep in the forest, a beast came. We think he took our brother because we didn't see him after that."

Now, let us now leave the brothers, who were pardoned by their father, and let's take another direction, for there was a shepherd, and this shepherd found a bone the size of a reed and made a pipe out of it. When he blew it, the pipe made sounds and began to speak:

"Oh shepherd, holding me in your hand,  
they killed me cruelly in this land.  
They stole the feather of the Hu.  
Oh brother, oh traitor, it was you."<sup>119</sup>

When the shepherd heard these words, he said to himself, "No need to keep herding these sheep anymore! I can earn my living better with this pipe. I don't need the sheep!"

So he took the pipe, left the sheep behind him, and set off for Naples, where he began to play his pipe. The king was looking out his window, and when he heard the tones of the pipe, he said, "What a beautiful sound that pipe is making! Have that shepherd come up here!"

The shepherd entered and began to play the pipe before his royal majesty.

119 O picuraru chi 'mmanu mi teni  
E m'ammazzaru all'acqua sirena,  
E m'ammazzaru pi 'na pinna di hu:  
Traditori mà frati fu . . .

"What is this pipe saying, little shepherd?" the king asked.

"Your majesty, I found a little bone, and I made this pipe to earn my bread. It's the pipe that speaks."

Then the king said to him, "Give me this pipe!"

No sooner did the king take the pipe and began playing it, the pipe spoke to him:

"Oh father, holding me in your hand,  
they killed me cruelly in this land.  
They stole the feather of the Hu.  
Oh brother, oh traitor, it was you."

"Aha," the king said to his eldest son, "what is this pipe saying? Take it. You play it!"

The son obeyed and took the pipe. When he began playing and playing, the pipe said:

"Oh brother, holding me in your hand,  
you killed me cruelly in this land.  
You stole the feather of the Hu.  
Oh brother, oh traitor, it was you."

When the father heard these words, he was struck by great pain, and after he fell to the ground, he fainted.

Then, when he recovered, he exclaimed, "What kind of a fiend do I have for a son! You murdered your brother just to bring me the Hu's feather!"

His son fell to his feet and asked for his pardon. His father wept and said, "What am I to do? . . . One and one are two? . . . It's all right. You have my blessing."

And he forgave him.

Then they took the pipe from the shepherd, but the shepherd said, "Your majesty, what am I to do now? I earn my bread with the pipe."

"Yes, shepherd," the king said to him. "From now on the pipe will stay here in my home, and there's a reward for you. Do you know how to read and write?"

"Yes, your majesty."

"Well then, you will become the captain of all my troops, and you may do or undo whatever you wish."

They remained happy and content, and we are here without a cent.  
*Told by Elisabetta Sanfratello in Vallelunga.*

## 80. THE CISTERN

Gentlemen, this tale has been told time and again. Once there were three sons of a king. Two of the sons were about to go hunting, and they didn't want to take their youngest brother with them. But their mother said to them, "I want you to take your brother with you right now."

Despite their mother's demand, they refused to take him along, but he followed them, and they had to take him with them. Once they reached the splendid plains, they found a beautiful cistern where they camped to eat their lunch. When they were about done, the eldest said, "Let's throw our brother into the cistern. There's no reason why we should take him with us."

Then he turned to the youngest brother and said, "Salvatore, do you want us to lower you down into the cistern? There's a treasure down there."

Salvatore said yes, and they lowered him down. When he reached the ground he found three beautiful rooms and an old woman, who said, "What are you doing here?"

"I'd like to know how to get out of here. Can you tell me how to do this?" he responded.

"Listen," the old woman alerted him, "there are three daughters of a king here, and a sorcerer has them in his power. So, take care."

"Don't worry. Just tell me what to do," he said. "I'm not afraid."

"Knock at that door."

He knocked at the door, and one of the daughters of the king appeared.

"Why have you come here?" she asked.

"I've come to rescue you. Tell me how I can do this."

"Take this apple," she said. "Then go through that door over there to my sister who can help you."

(She gave him the apple for a souvenir.)

So, he went to the door nearby and knocked, and another princess appeared. This one gave him a pomegranate.

"This is to remember me by. Now go to that door over there and knock, and there you'll find my sister who'll give you better information than I can."

So, he took the pomegranate, knocked at the door, and the last sister appeared.

"Ah, Salvatore!" she cried out, for she knew who he was, "what have you come to do?"

"I've come to rescue you. Tell me what I must do to free you."

The maiden picked up a crown and gave it to him.

"Take this," she said. "When you're in need, you're to say, 'Listen to my command! Listen to my command!' And the crown will serve you. Now enter and eat. Take this bottle. When you see that the sorcerer is about to get up, you are to hide behind the door. After he is fully awake, he'll say to you, 'Why have you come here?' You're to respond, 'I've come to fight you, my lord, but before we fight, we must make a pact. You must take a smaller horse and a smaller sword because I am smaller than you, and you must give me a larger horse and sword.' Be aware that there's a fountain there that will say, 'drink, drink!' But you're not to risk it, because all the statues standing there were human beings at one time because they drank from the fountain. When you become thirsty, you're to drink secretly from this bottle that you're to keep by your side."

With these instructions the young man went to knock at the door. Meanwhile the sorcerer got up and said to him, "What are you doing here?"

"I've come to fight you, my lord," and the young man told him exactly what the maiden had said he should. The fountain cried out: "Drink, drink!" But he refused to drink. They began to fight, and with his very first blow he cut off the head of the sorcerer. Then he took the head and the sword and went to the maiden.

"Let's get out of here," he said. "Get your things and let's go. My brothers are waiting for me at the mouth of the cistern."

Let us leave them for now, and turn to his brothers.

After his brothers had lowered him down into the cistern, they decided to leave and return to the royal palace.

"Well, where's your brother?" the king asked

"We lost him in the woods and weren't able to find him."

"You better be quick about it and get me my son!" the king declared. "If not, I'll have you both beheaded."

The two brothers departed, and along the way they found a man who had a rope and bell with him. So they took him with them, and when they reached the cistern, they dropped the rope with the bell down into it.

"If he's alive," they said to each other, "he'll hear the bell, and climb up. If he's dead, we won't be able to face our father."

When they dropped the rope, Salvatore had each one of three princesses climb up one at a time. When the eldest sister appeared, the eldest brother said, "Oh, what a beautiful maiden! This one will become my wife!"

When the second princess appeared, the other brother said, "This one will be mine."

The last sister told Salvatore that she didn't want to climb up.

"You climb up first, Salvatore. Otherwise, your brothers will leave you down here."

He said, no, and they began quarreling. He won, and the maiden had to climb up. When she appeared, the brothers took her and left Salvatore down in the cistern, while they went to the palace. Salvatore remained alone at the bottom and didn't know what to do.

When his brothers reached the palace, they said, "Father, we looked everywhere for Salvatore, but we couldn't find him. However, we found these three maidens and want to marry them."

"I want this one there," the eldest brother said.

"And I want that one," the younger brother declared. "We'll find some one else for the third sister."

Now let's leave them and turn to Salvatore.

When Salvatore saw that he was alone and in a hopeless situation, he searched his pockets and touched the apple.

"Oh, my apple, help me get out of here!"

All at once he was outside and departed for the city, where he encountered a silversmith, who hired him as an apprentice and gave him food and clothes. While he was working with the silversmith, the king sent for the silversmith and commanded him to make a crown for his eldest son who was about to marry.

"I want you to make a crown for my son," he said, "and you're to bring it to me tomorrow evening!"

The king gave him ten gold coins and sent him away. When he returned to his home, the silversmith was very upset because he didn't know how he could make a crown in such a short time.

"What's the matter, grandfather?<sup>120</sup> Why are you so upset?"

"Take these ten gold coins," he responded. "I'm going to take refuge in the church because there's nothing else I can do."

(In the olden days the church was granted a privilege: whoever robbed or killed and then went into a church could not be touched.)<sup>121</sup>

"All right," replied the young man, "while you're in the church, I'll see if I can make the crown. Why does my grandfather have to go into the church for such a trivial thing?"

He took some materials and began making the crown. And what did he do?

120 The term grandfather (*nunnu* or *nonno*) was used with older men as a sign of respect and affection.

121 The storyteller is talking about ecclesiastical immunity. The church was a place where people sought refuge, and this ancient notion of the church's privilege was maintained by the Sicilian people for a long time.

Well, he took out the apple and ordered it to make a beautiful crown. He hammered away, but it was really the apple that made the crown. When he was finished, he gave it to the silversmith's wife, who carried it to her husband. When the silversmith saw there was no necessity to remain in the church, he went to the king with the crown. The king was content and invited him to the celebration that evening. The silversmith recounted what happened when he returned home, and the young man asked, "Grandfather, will you take me to the celebration?"

"How can I take you to the celebration like that? You have no clothes. I'll buy you some later, and when there's another celebration, I'll take you with me."

After two hours passed, the silversmith went to the celebration. Meanwhile, Salvatore took the apple and said, "Oh my apple, give me clothes and a carriage and as many coachmen as I desire. I want to go and see my brother get married."

All at once he was dressed like a prince. When he arrived at the royal palace, he went to the kitchen where he took a big stick, watched his brother marry the princess, and then gave the poor silversmith a good beating and departed. When he arrived home, he made sure that the silversmith's wife did not see him. Then when he saw the silversmith arrive home, he went to greet his grandfather, who began crying out, "I'm dying! I'm dying!"

"What's the matter, grandfather?" the young man asked.

"What's the matter?" he responded. "While I was at the feast, a prince came at me with a stick, and he beat me to a pulp."

"You see, grandfather," said the young man, "if you had taken me to the celebration, this wouldn't have happened."

After a day had passed, the king called the silversmith to the palace again and ordered him to make another crown within twenty-four hours for his second son who was going to get married. The same thing that happened the first time happened again. The silversmith went to the church, while his apprentice made the crown, even better and larger than the first one, this time with the help of the pomegranate. The silversmith carried it to the palace, but after he went to the celebration, he returned home with his shoulders bruised from the beating that he received.

Soon the king wanted to marry off the third sister, the youngest, who said, "Whoever wants me must wait one year, one month, and one day."

The princess could not find any peace of mind because Salvatore hadn't appeared. After all, she thought, he should appear because he had the apple, the pomegranate, and the crown. When a year, a month, and a day had passed, plans were made for her wedding, and the silversmith was ordered to make

another crown more beautiful than the other two. (This was because the princess was a foreigner, and they wanted to show they treated foreigners as well if not better than their own.) The silversmith threw away the money that the king gave him and took refuge in the church.

“Grandfather,” the apprentice responded. “I’ll take the hammer and stones and see if I can make the crown.”

When he saw that he was alone, the young man ordered the magic crown to make a better and larger crown than the other two to help him. As soon as the crown was finished, the silversmith carried it to the king, and the king’s mouth dropped open in astonishment when he saw the magnificent crown. Once again he invited the silversmith to the celebration, and the silversmith went home somewhat worried because he was afraid that he would receive another beating. Even so, he refused to take the apprentice with him to the wedding.

When Salvatore saw him depart, he took the magic crown and ordered expensive clothes and a carriage. After he arrived at the palace, he didn’t go into the kitchen, but went up to the bridal couple and before they could say “yes” to one another and become married, he cried out, “Stop!” Then he took out the apple and said, “Who gave this apple to me?”

“I did,” said the princess married to the eldest brother.

“And who gave me this pomegranate?”

“I did, brother-in-law,” responded the princess married to the second brother.

Then Salvatore took out the crown and said, “And who gave me this crown?”

“I did, my husband,” said the youngest princess who was about to be wed.

And at once she married Salvatore because, as she said, “he was the one who freed us from the sorcerer.”


The bridegroom felt snubbed and disappointed and took his leave, while the astonished silversmith fell to his knees and asked for pity and mercy. Well, that’s enough except to say:

They remained happy and content

While we were left without a cent.

*Told by Elisabetta Sanfratello in Vallelunga.*

## 81. THE MAGIC LANTERN

nce upon a time there was a father and mother, who sent their son to school. Now this son was disobedient and was easily led astray by a handsome young man who said to him, "Come with me and do what I say."

The young man took him into the countryside. As soon as he saw a tree, he said to the boy, "Break off some branches."

So the boy went and tore off some branches from the tree and brought them to the young man. Soon it became dark in the woods, and they spent the night there. The next morning, as they got ready to depart, they saw an old hedge, took an axe, and chopped off the thorns and leaves. Then they saw a large beautiful marble rock. They climbed to the top of it and saw a door to an underground cave.

"I want you to go down below," the young man said to the boy.

"No," he responded. "I'm afraid."

The young man had a ring on his finger, and when he took it off and gave it to him, the boy agreed to go down into the cave. So he kicked open the door and climbed down. Soon he found some money but did not take it. There was another door, and after he entered, he came across double the amount of gold, but he didn't touch it. He went into another room, where there were heaps of gold coins, but the owner told him not to touch the money. Then he saw another door, and after kicking it down, he saw a beautiful garden filled with fruit trees, but he didn't pick any of the fruit. At the very end of the garden there was a lantern, which he picked up and took with him. Along the way he gathered some fruit and put it into a sack. Finally, as he approached the entrance of the cave with the lantern, the young man called out and said he wanted the lantern, but the boy responded, "I'm not going to give it to you because you'll leave me here."

When the young man realized he wouldn't get the lantern, he pushed a rock to cover the mouth of the underground cave and left the boy below. So the boy returned to the bottom and sat down in the room filled with heaps of gold coins. As he began to cry, he saw a book, and when he picked it up with his hand, the book said, "Your word is my command!" The boy responded by saying that he wanted to be brought above ground. All at once he was standing outside. Then he returned to his mother's home. Since she was dying of hunger, she said to him, "My son, polish the lantern, and let's see what happens."

No sooner did the boy touch the lantern than it said, "Your wish is my command!"

"I want food for me and my mother," the boy replied.

All at once, the lantern produced seven silver plates of food for them. After they had eaten everything, the plates disappeared. Then the boy turned to the lantern and ordered some more food, and each time he commanded the lantern, it produced more things to eat. The boy also gave his mother the fruit that he had picked from the garden.

Now there was a king who had two daughters, and they were married off. However, he had a third daughter, and one day the boy took a plate of fruit, gave it to his mother, told her to hide it beneath her dress, and said, "Take the fruit to the king."

When she reached the first guard, he asked, "Where are you going, my good old woman?"

"I have something to say to the king."

Then the second guard asked, "Where are you going, my good old woman?"

"I've got something to say to the king."

The guard let the old woman pass, and they went up the stairs.

"Your majesty," the guard said, "there's an old woman who wants to speak with you."

The old woman entered, and the king summoned her into a separate room to speak with her. Once they were alone, the old woman took out the plate of fruit.

"Who's sent me this plate of fruit?" the king asked.

"My son," said the old woman.

"What does your son want?" the king inquired.

"Your daughter for his wife."

"Come back in a week's time," the king said, "and you'll have your answer. And I want you to bring me another plate of fruit."

The old woman went back to her home.

"What did you do?" he son asked.

"In a week's time I'll bring you the king's answer," his mother said.

The next time her son gave her another plate of fruit and said, "Now, see if the king is more accommodating."

The mother returned to the palace, climbed the stairs, and said to the king, "Your majesty, what did you decide?"

"Your son must come and speak to me."

Her son came, and as he approached the king, he asked, "When may I marry your daughter?"

"You'll need to build a palace for her," the king replied.


After two days he commanded the lantern to build him a palace. Then he

went and married the king's daughter. Afterwards he went in a carriage with his entire family to his palace, and his mother lived with them.

Now they're all comfortable and consoled,  
But we have nothing but this tale well told.

*Collected by Professor Letterio Lizio-Bruno in Rocca Valdina.*

## 82. THE EMPEROR SCURSUNI

nce there were two friends, and one of them had a son while the other had no children at all. They both loved this son very much. The two friends were important merchants who sailed the seas and visited many kingdoms. One day the friend who didn't have a son had to depart on a voyage, and the young man asked him and his father whether he could embark with him and learn something about sailing and trading. But both the father and godfather refused to give their permission. However, the son insisted so much that both men finally had to yield and agreed to let him depart.

While they were on the high seas in two different ships, a fierce storm erupted, and it was so violent that the two ships lost contact with each other. The young man was on one of them, and his godfather on the other. The godfather's ship managed to get through the storm, but the young man's ship hit a reef, and the entire crew drowned. Fortunately, the young man managed to grab hold of a plank and began to maneuver it so that he eventually reached land. Once there, he began to wander about and felt discouraged. When he entered a forest filled with wild animals, he climbed a tree at night to protect himself from them. The next day he looked around to make sure that there were no more wild animals so he could continue on his way. As he was walking, he came upon some walls surrounding the forest, and he began climbing them to see what was on the other side. Once he reached the top of one of the walls, he saw a large city, for the walls had been built to protect the people from the animals so they wouldn't be eaten.

Upon realizing this, the young man looked around to see how he could climb down from the walls and head toward the city to save himself. Finally, after he found a way, he climbed down and began walking toward the city. Once he was there, he went looking about for something to eat. Soon he found a few shops and entered, but wherever he went to ask for food, nobody would give him anything to eat or any information. Finally, he went to ask for

food at the royal palace, but the guard remained silent. Driven by hunger and desperation because nobody would talk to him, he began to walk through all the rooms of the palace because it was a matter of life and death. When he entered the very best room filled with royal beds and many other things, he decided to rest there. But all at once he saw some beautiful young ladies, who set the table for him to eat. So he sat down, and once he finished eating, he lay down to sleep.

This way of life continued for another two weeks. Then one night, while he was sleeping, an extremely beautiful young woman accompanied by two maidens appeared before him.

“Are you courageous and steadfast?” she asked him.

“Yes, I am,” he responded.

“Well, if you are courageous and reliable, I shall tell you my secret. I am the daughter of the Emperor Scursuni, and before my father died, he cast a spell on this city and on all the people, servants, soldiers, and also on me. This spell continues to hold its sway over us because a sorcerer maintains it. But if you promise to stay by my bedside for one year without looking at me and telling anyone about my secret, the spell over this city will be broken, and I’ll be empress and you’ll be acclaimed emperor by all the people.”

He responded by saying that he was ready to withstand anything that might occur. Well, after a few days the young man asked the princess to let him go and see his father, mother, and godfather, and he would return as soon as possible. She was undecided as to whether she should let him go, but he kept on asking until she gave in. However, she told him not to speak to anyone about her secret and immediately commanded a ship that was to transport him and gave him a wand.

“All you have to do is tell this wand where you want to go, and you’ll immediately find yourself in your father’s realm.”

She also gave him some of her treasures, and as soon he arrived at the port of his father’s city, he ordered that all the treasures be carried to the best inn. When he went there himself, he asked the innkeeper whether there were any sea merchants in the city. The innkeeper responded that there were two very important merchants, but they had been reduced to poverty because the son of one of these friends had drowned at sea. The other merchant, the father of the son, did not believe him and accused his friend in a lawsuit of being guilty of his son’s death. In the process both of them lost everything they had.

When the son heard this story, he immediately sent for his father and said, “I would like to do some business with you and your friend because I’ve heard that you are experienced sea merchants.”

His father responded that it was impossible to do business with the other

merchant because both he and his friend had gone bankrupt because of a lawsuit concerning his son who had been lost at sea.

"None of this matters to me," the young merchant said, "because I'll provide all the capital that you'll need."

Upon saying this, he ordered a great meal to be prepared and sent for the other merchant and the wives of the two men. When they began to eat, the two merchants scowled at each other and couldn't eat a thing. As soon as the young man noticed this, he picked up a forkful of food from his plate and offered it to his father.

"Dear father," he said, "please accept this morsel because your son is right by your side, safe and sound."

Upon hearing this, they all jumped for joy, hugged and kissed each other, and shed tears of joy. Afterward the young man brought out the treasures and divided them between his father and his godfather so that they could continue trading as merchants. At the same time, however, he told them he had to make a return voyage without telling them where. His mother wanted to know where he was going and began to plead with him to tell them where, and she pleaded so much that her son told her everything that had happened and about the splendid princess whom he met and was not allowed to gaze at her beautiful body.

"Take this Holy Week candle," his mother responded, "and when she is asleep, you can light the candle and look at her beautiful body."

Her son departed, and when he arrived at the Emperor Scursuni's city, he went to the royal palace, where he met the princess, who was waiting for him. When she went to bed that night and fell asleep—and it seemed to him that he had to wait a hundred years to see her body—he took the candle, lit it, and held it over her body to see her beauty. By accident a drop of wax fell on her flesh so that she awoke and cried out, "You traitor! You've revealed my secret! Because of you I shall have to remain under the magic spell, and so will everyone else! The only way you can save me is by going into the wild forest, where you must fight the sorcerer and kill him."

"Oh, woe is me!" the young man responded. "Tell me, what do I have to do after I've killed him?"

"I'm going to give you a magic wand to do battle with the sorcerer," she said. "After he's dead, you're to slit open his stomach, and you'll find a rabbit. Then you're to slit open the rabbit, and you'll find a dove. Cut open the dove, and you'll find three eggs. Guard them as though they were your own eyes and carry them to me safe and sound. This is what you must do to free the city and all of us who are in it. Otherwise, you'll be brought under the spell just like everyone else."

The young man departed and headed toward the forest, armed with the magic wand that was given to him by the princess. When he arrived at the edge of the forest, he found a herd of cows, and all the cowherds and the padrone who owned the cows were with them. He approached them and told them that he had lost his way and would like a piece of bread. Not only did the padrone give him something to eat, but he kept him on as a cowherd. After some days passed, the padrone told him to take the cows out to pasture but not to allow them to enter the forest because there was a sorcerer, who killed both cows and humans. The young man said he would do as he said. However, he took the cows and drove them right into the forest. When the owner saw this, he became desperate and began to weep because none of the cowherds would go into the forest to bring the cows back. The young man, however, entered the forest with another boy, and they were both frightened. Meanwhile, the sorcerer saw the cow, flew into a rage, and picked up an iron club with six bronze spikes. As soon as the boy saw the sorcerer approach, he shit in his pants out of fear and hid behind a bush. However, the young man was steadfast and held his ground.

“Traitor!” cried the sorcerer when he arrived. “Why have you come and caused all this damage to my forest?”

“I’ve not only come to damage your forest but to destroy your life.”

Immediately they began to fight, and they fought the entire day until they were finally exhausted. Yet, neither one of them was wounded, and while they were fighting, the magician said,

“If I had a good soup of bread and wine,  
I’d slaughter you just like a swine!”

And the young man responded,

“If I had a good soup of milk and bread,  
I’d slaughter you and slice off your head!”

After saying this, they said farewell and agreed to meet the next day to continue their battle. The young man herded the cows, and together with the boy, he drove them back to the barn. When they arrived, everyone was astounded because they had come back safe and sound. The boy told the owner and everyone else all about the great battle between the sorcerer and the young man that he had watched, and he mentioned that the young man had asked for bread and milk. So the owner ordered bread and milk to be prepared for the next day and had the bread and milk put into a pail. Then he gave the pail to the young boy and told him to have it ready the following day.

When daylight arrived, the young man took the cows into the forest once

again, and the battle began. As they fought, the sorcerer demanded bread and wine to cut the young man to the ground. But he couldn't get any. The young man demanded bread and milk to kill the sorcerer, and all at once the bread and milk appeared. The young man scooped up a handful of bread and milk, and after he munched on it, he dealt a blow to the head of the sorcerer causing him to fall to the ground dead. Immediately he sliced open the sorcerer's stomach and found the rabbit. Then he sliced open the rabbit and found the dove. Finally, he sliced open the dove and found the three eggs that he guarded carefully as he returned the cows to the barn. Everyone welcomed him in triumph, and the owner wanted him to remain on the farm where he would be well treated. But he responded that he couldn't stay, and after presenting the forest to the owner as a gift, he departed. When he arrived at the city, he went straight into the royal palace, and the princess came to greet him. She took him by the hand and led him into the secret cabinet of the Emperor Scursuni, her father, and she took the emperor's crown and put it on his head.

"You are now the emperor," she said, "and I'm the empress."

Once he was crowned, she led him to the balcony, took out the three eggs, and said, "Throw one to the right, one to the left, and the last one, straight ahead."

As soon as he did this, all the people began to speak, shout, and proclaim their freedom. The carriages started to roll. The troops began their exercises, and the guards changed posts. Everyone began to thank the man who had liberated them and cried out, "Long live our emperor! Long live our empress!"

And so they remained emperor and empress

While we are still poor and live in distress.

*Collected by Antonio Rasti at Palazzo-Adriano.*

## 83. THE ROGUE

**I**t's been told time and again that there was once an old woman, and she had a wretched son named Peppi. Now, this young man didn't like to work, but his mother hired him out to a baker who gave him all that he could eat and some clothes instead of a salary. When this wretch of a young man was at the baker's shop, he took a basket of bread, placed it in front of him, and ate every single loaf. When the baker saw that this young man's

eating habits would ruin him, he cried out, "Oh! What am I going to do? This lad will be the end of me!"

So he told him to leave his shop. After Peppi left, he hired himself out as a stable boy to groom the animals. When he arrived, he began to clean out the stable, and in the middle of some dung, he found a knife. What was he to do? He began to clean it as best he could, and when it sparkled, he put it into his pocket. After the owner of the farm tried him out several days, he realized that Peppi was a big eater and a grumbler, so he sent him packing. After Peppi left, he went home to his mother.

"Ohh!" his mother said, "Oh, how wretched you are! You've come back again? Get out of here! You know I can't support you."

Peppi made the rounds and hired himself out as a cowherd on a farm. He signed a contract with the farmer, and after he did this, the farmer said, "Listen, I want to warn you about something: you're not to take the cows to the part of the field where there's grass. I want you to keep them in the field below."

"But why?" Peppi asked.

"Because there's an ogre there, and if he sees you, he'll kill you and take the cows."

The next day Peppi went to take the cows out to the pasture, but before he did this, he had the farmer give him a piece of cheese. Then he put the cheese into a sack, got the cows ready, and began walking to the field. When he arrived there, however, he saw that the ground was as bare as the palm of his hand.

"Am I supposed to be so dumb to keep these animals here where they'll certainly die from starvation?" he asked. "I'm going to take them to the grass field, ogre or no ogre! I'm not afraid of anyone."

And so Peppi took them there. After a good amount of time had passed and the cows had eaten well so that their bellies were full, the ogre appeared at the field and began to shout, "Hey, you! You over there! What are you doing?"

"I'm giving the cows something to eat."

"You'd better get out of here. If I come, I'll put more holes in you than a drainer has!"

Peppi turned to him and shouted back, "You'd better watch out that I don't come and squeeze you like I squeeze stones!"

As he said this, he bent down as if to pick up a stone, but he took the piece of cheese, squeezed it, and caused some juice to flow from the cheese. When the ogre saw this, he said, "Well, if he can cause juice to flow from a stone, he must be stronger than I am!"

So he turned around and slipped away without saying "ciao." That evening

Peppi brought the cows back fully content and led them into the stable. When the farmer saw them with their full bellies, he became infuriated.

"Hey you! I say, you, where did you take the cows?"

"Where you told me to take them."

"What? Didn't you take them to the ogre?"

"No, sir."

"Then why are they so full?"

"Because they ate as much as they wanted."

"Listen," the farmer said, "if you go to the ogre's grass field, I'm going to cut your throat! I don't want to lose one single cow because of you!"

"Certainly," Peppi responded, "I know you'll groan and moan if I bring the cows to the ogre's field, but if I take them to the field you told me to take them, what then?"

The next day Peppi went and did the same thing, and for a few days more, he kept on bringing the cows to the field with grass. Each morning, the ogre felt threatened by Peppi because he felt he might be squeezed like a rock. So he decided it might be best to become Peppi's friend.

"Listen," he said, "do you want to come and have a meal of macaroni with me?"

"No sir," responded Peppi. "I know you want to trick me and kill me."

"Not at all," the ogre said. "I won't kill you. I promise!"

"And the cows?"

"Let them eat the grass where they are."

So Peppi went with the ogre to eat some macaroni. But before he did this, what do you think he did? He took a sack and stuck it beneath his shirt, right above his stomach, so that the ogre wouldn't notice anything. The ogre went to cook a huge quantity of pasta, enough to feed an army. He poured it over a kneading trough, and both of them began to stuff themselves. They ate and ate, and the ogre continued to fetch more pots of pasta.

"Eat, Peppi, eat!"

Peppi pretended to eat and stuff himself, but when he ate, he stuck the pasta into the sack. He kept doing this until the pasta was finished.

"Wait now, Peppi! Now that you're full," the ogre said, "I'm going to have a little chat with you."

But Peppi didn't lose any time. He jumped from his seat and began running with the ogre chasing after him. In the meantime, the cows returned to the stable and were very content. When the farmer saw that the cows were alone, he said, "Ahh, this time Peppi got caught. I told him so!"

But let's return to Peppi who was running with the ogre right behind him. When Peppi saw that the ogre was almost at his heels, he pulled out the cheese

and pretended to squeeze it like a stone, turned around, and yelled, "If you come any closer, I'll squeeze you like this stone."

The ogre kept after him and cried out, "If I catch up to you, I'll drill holes into your head so it will become a drainer. Just you wait!"

"And I'm going to empty my stomach and throw out the macaroni so I can run faster," responded Peppi. And so he took the knife and stuck it into his stomach, and the macaroni poured onto the ground.

"What's that I see?" the ogre said. "All the macaroni altogether! He must be some kind of a devil! But now that he's stabbed himself, he'll certainly fall down, and I'll get a hold of him."

But that's not what happened. Peppi turned and vanished before his eyes and returned to the farm.

"You're alive?" the farmer asked.

"What else should I be, dead?"

"And the ogre?"

"How should I know?"

"Go, go," the farmer said. "Look after the animals that have returned and feed them."

"No, sir," he answered. "I'm leaving to look after my own affairs. I quit."

"If you leave, I'm not going to pay you."

"I don't care. I'm going to look after my own affairs."

So Peppi departed and went to the ogre's domain. When he arrived there, he found the ogre's pig keeper, and he killed him with his knife. Then he took possession of the pigs as though they were his own and wanted to lead them away. Just at that moment the ogre arrived.

"Hey you, are you new here?" the ogre asked.

"I'm looking after my pigs."

"These pigs are mine."

"No, sir, they're mine. I'm telling you the truth, and I can prove it. My pigs have a hole beneath their tails."

They inspected the pigs one after the other, and all of them had a hole. How could they not? So Peppi's trick worked, and he took the pigs as though they were his own. The ogre turned to him and said, "Get out of here! Take them! I see that I can't compete with you. But just make sure that you don't let me see you around here anymore!"

Enough said. Peppi placed himself at the head of the pigs and began walking. Whenever he was hungry, he stopped and made a large campfire with wood, gathered together some embers, slaughtered a pig, and devoured it. While he was traveling, he encountered a man carrying a mountain on his shoulders.

"Hey you, do you want to come with me?" Peppi asked.

"Where?"

"To take care of our affairs."

"Let's go."

So the two of them continued walking. They walked and walked until they came to a large river, an enormous river, and there was a man who was holding up the river with his beard preventing it from flowing, and Peppi thought to himself, "This man's got to be stronger than the one who was carrying the mountain." So he turned to him and said, "Hey you, do you want to come with us?"

"Where to?"

"To take care of our affairs."

"Sure, I'll come along."

He let go of the river and began to walk with the other two. While they were walking, they met another man who was pounding steel with his fist.

"Ah," Peppi said, "this man is stronger than the other two! Hey you, do you want to come with us and look after our affairs?"

"Why not? I'll come."

So all four of them continued on their way. They walked and walked, and when they were hungry, they roasted a pig and then continued their journey. When they reached a grotto, they went inside. The man who had been carrying the mountain stayed there to keep guard. The others went out to look for something to eat. After a good amount of time had passed, they returned with an ox.

"Here," Peppi said. "Cook it for us while we continue searching for things. Then we'll return to eat with you."

While the mountain man was putting some wood beneath a pan and the meat was almost cooked, an old woman suddenly appeared.

"Ohh," she said. "Please be so kind and give me a piece of the meat because I have two little ones dying of hunger."

"Wait a moment. I'll see if the meat is cooked and I'll give you a piece," he said.

And while he approached the pan to see if the meat was cooked, the old woman gave him a blow to the head with a large piece of wood so that he fell to the ground half dead and half alive. She took all the meat and disappeared. When the others returned to eat, they found their companion completely stunned.

"What's the matter? What happened to the meat that you were cooking?"

"What do you want from me? An old woman came, and this is what happened . . ."

And he began telling them the entire story. When he was finished, Peppi said.

"All right, enough for now. Here's another ox. You with the beard, you remain here, while we others will go and look for another ox. After you cook this ox that we're leaving here, we'll return to eat it. But be on your guard. If the old woman comes, don't let her smash you. Get the better of her and give her a beating!"

So the man with the beard remained at the entrance to the grotto, while the others went off to hunt for another ox. While he was cooking and the meat was half done, the old woman arrived.

"Oh, my grace, please have mercy and give me a little piece of the meat?"

"Come, come, and I'll give you a piece."

He went to look at the meat, and wham! The old woman gave him a blow on the head with a piece of wood, and he lay flat on the ground. The old woman took the meat and dashed off. When Peppi returned and heard what happened, he began to complain because he was hungry. He left the third man who pounded steel in charge, gave him another ox, and went away as usual. Then the same thing occurred: the old woman came, took the meat, left the man almost dead on the ground, and went off. When Peppi returned with his companions and heard what had happened, he began to curse more and more.

"I can't trust anyone from now on," he said, "not you, you, or you. Now I'm going to stay here. While you all go off and gather wood, I'll cook the ox. Let's see this time whether we'll eat or not."

So he stayed there, and while he was cooking, the old woman arrived.

"Will you do me a favor please and give me some meat? I have two children dying of hunger?"

"Of course, my lady. Of course, mother. Approach and take whatever you want."

The old woman approached the pan, but just as she did, Peppi gave her a good whack, and she lay stretched out on the ground. Then he took his knife and sliced off her head. When the head was cut off, it began to roll on the ground until it came to a hole and fell into it. Peppi watched all this without saying anything. Then he took the body and wrapped it in between two pieces of wood and placed it in a corner of the grotto. Just at that moment his companions arrived.

"You see," he said, "the meat is cooked!"

"Who came?"

"Nobody. And that's why I think you all ate the meat and I was left starving. But enough now. Let's eat."

When they finished eating, Peppi said, "Now let's see which one of you can carry that bunch of wood over there."

The first companion tried, then the next, and finally the third, and none of them was able to move it or had the strength to do it. Then Peppi went and pushed it with one hand.

"Do you see?" he said. "I'm stronger than you are."

"Let's see what's inside! Let's see what's there!" the others responded.

They untied the pieces of wood and found the old woman.

"Ohh!" one of them remarked. "That's why we weren't able to move it."

And Peppi told them everything.

"What about the head?"

"The head rolled by itself on the ground and fell into that hole over there. Now let's see what's down there. You three stay here and watch over things while I'll go down and take a look."

After he descended, he found many little witches who were weeping.

"Ohh!" they howled. "You've killed our mother, and now who's going to bring us something to eat?"

While they were talking, Peppi began to walk around the house and saw a dove sitting on a nest, and beneath the dove were two eggs. He went over and took them. One of them fell to the ground and broke. The other remained in his hand. When the little witches saw this, they began to scream: "Ahh! Don't touch them! Ahh! Our mother is still in the process of dying."

"Where is your mother?" he replied.

"There, inside."

"All right, take me to her!"

The little witches took him inside a room, and as soon as he entered, he saw the old woman lying on a beautiful bed and groaning as if she were sick.

"How come you're still alive?" Peppi asked.

"Oh, please, don't make me die. Give me my egg. Isn't it enough that you've already broken one of them and you've reduced me to this condition?"

"Tell me where we are!"

"We're in the underworld, outside of the earth."

At that very moment Peppi squeezed the egg a bit.

"Oww! Oww!" the old woman cried out. "Don't squash the egg, otherwise you'll kill me!"

"Well then, tell me what's the meaning of this closed door with seven padlocks right in front of me?

"Three beautiful maidens are locked inside, three princesses under a spell."

"Give me the key!"

"Not until you give me my egg!"

"No, first give me the key!"

"No, first the egg!"

"Well, then I'm going to squash it!"

"Oww! Oww! Take it, take the key!" the old woman shrieked. "That's enough. I don't want to die!"

So she took off a huge key that she kept tied around her neck and gave it to Peppi. As soon as he had it in his hand, he squeezed the egg with all his might and crushed it. All at once the old woman died, and all the little witches died with her. Now Peppi went to open the seven padlocks to the iron door and saw three beautiful maidens as radiant as the sun, more beautiful than anything he had ever seen.

"You are our savior!" they cried out joyfully and happily. "Long live our savior who's broken the magic spell!"

"But tell me, how did you three get here?" Peppi asked.

"How did we get here? That monstrous witch came to our place and kidnapped us at night, and even though we are daughters of a king, she kept us locked up like coarse slaves."

"Oh, well," said Peppi. "Now the witch is dead. Her face has lost its color, and she can no longer cast any magic spells. Come with me and I'll bring you back to the world."

So, he brought them to the rope that was hanging down the hole which he had entered. He called up to his companions so that they would know he was there and tied one of the maidens to the rope.

"I'll be the last to be pulled up," he said. "I'm afraid that one of you might become frightened down here alone."

His companions pulled and pulled until the first beautiful princess appeared.

"This maiden is going to be mine," said the first companion who carried a mountain on his shoulders.

They threw down the rope, and then pulled and pulled again until the second beautiful princess appeared.

"This maiden is mine," said the companion who stopped the flow of the river with his beard.

They dropped down the rope again, and pulled and pulled until the third beautiful princess was visible.

"She's mine," said the companion who pounded iron with his fist.

Then they dropped the rope down again and began to pull up Peppi, who saw how high and far it was to the top of the hole. So, he cried out, "Pull hard, and don't let me drop!"

However, as his three companions were pulling and Peppi was midway up

the hole, they let go of the rope and “boom!” Peppi fell to the ground while each one of his companions grabbed hold of a beautiful princess.

“Oho!” they said. “We’re safe now! Even though that wretch of a fellow is stronger than we are, he’s done for now and can’t rule us with his iron rod. Our fortune’s been made, and each one of us can go to the separate kingdom of each one of these princesses.”

And so they began their journeys, each one content about his luck.

But let us turn back to Peppi and let them continue on their journey. The wretched fellow was still alive after the fall, but he was maimed and stunned and began to complain and despair about his fate.

“Now what am I to do? How am I going to get out of here and return to the world?”

Down in the hole there were many little eagles who heard him, and they asked, “What’s the matter? Why are you weeping?”

“What’s the matter, you ask? Look at what’s happened to me, and now I don’t know what to do to avoid my death.”

“We’ll tell you what to do,” the little eagles said to him. “Do you see that mountain? Go over there, and you’ll find our mother. Ask her if she’ll carry you up to the world.”

So this is what he did. He arrived at the mountain and asked the eagle to carry him up to the world.

“I’ll carry you,” she said, “but you must give me meat to eat while I’m flying. If not, I’ll let you drop.”

So, Peppi began killing any kind of animal he could find on the mountain, and he gathered together as much meat as he could carry. He packed it on top of the eagle, got on top of her, and the eagle took off. As she was flying, she cried out, “meat!” and Peppi gave her pieces of meat. Whenever she beat her wings and cried out “meat!” Peppi gave some to her. When all the meat was finished, they were still flying.

“Meat!” the eagle cried out.

“I don’t have any more.”

“Meat! Otherwise, I’ll let you drop!”

So Peppi cut off one of his feet and gave it to her.

“Meat!”

And Peppi cut off the other foot, and the eagle devoured it.

“Meat!”

And Peppi cut off a leg and gave it to her. In short, he cut off his legs, thighs, his hand, his left arm, and they still had not arrived above in the world.

“Meat!” the eagle cried out.

“What more can I give you? What more can I cut off?”

The eagle flew upwards with great speed and landed. Then she unloaded Peppi on the ground.

“Why are you throwing me down here?” Peppi asked. “Why are you leaving me here to die with just my bust? Eat the rest of me and make an end of me.”

At this point the eagle vomited up his arm, his hand, his legs, and thighs and attached everything back on to him.

“Go, get out of here. I’ve seen that you’re a man of your word!”

And the eagle returned from where she came (and you should know that this eagle was really a fairy in the form of an eagle).

When Peppi saw that he had been rescued, he began to run in order to catch up with his three companions who had betrayed him and carried off the three princesses. He kept traveling until he reached a village.

“Has anyone seen three men pass by here carrying three beautiful maidens?”

“Yes, signor, they’re up ahead.”

So Peppi ran and ran and came to another village.

“Did you happen to see three men pass by?”

“They’re further up ahead.”

And Peppi ran as fast as he could until he found them.

“Aha! You vile traitors!” he cried out. “How could you do that to me? What right do you have to these three beautiful princesses? Ahh! Godless traitors! Now I’m going to kill you!”

And so he pulled out his knife, sliced them to pieces like sausages, and left them lying on the ground. Then what did he do? Well, he took the three princesses with him and sent two of them back to their kingdoms. He kept the smallest and most beautiful with him and went off to her kingdom. Once there, imagine how much they rejoiced and celebrated that the princess had been rescued! Peppi married the princess, and they did all the fine and beautiful things that rulers usually do. And so

They remained happy and content

While we still don’t have a single cent.

*Told by Nina Fedele, a young peasant, to Salvatore Salomone-Marino at Borgetto.*

## 84. THE BEAUTY OF THE SEVEN MOUNTAINS OF GOLD

Once upon a time there was a merchant without children, and he prayed to the Lord to send him a son. Soon after—to everyone's delight—his wife became pregnant and gave birth to a handsome baby boy. Imagine the happiness of the father whose wish had been fulfilled!

The story moves quickly. As soon as the boy grew up, his father sent him to school. But at school, he was a devil and very restless. He hit one student on the head. He tipped over someone else's inkstand. He pushed another student. He made promises that he didn't keep. The poor teacher couldn't control him and said to his father: "We must put an end to this! Take your son home. I don't want him at school anymore."

But when he was home, the boy caused more mischief. So his father and mother decided to send him to board at a monastery. Yet as soon as he entered, he began to pick a quarrel with this person and then with that person until the teacher kicked him out.

The poor father didn't know what to do anymore. Whenever he saw his son touch something, it broke.

"Let's put him in a seminary!"

Once he arrived at the seminary, he did more damage: he broke someone's head and scratched someone else's face. He hurt another boy so much that he howled. One day he did something so bad that he knew the prefect would beat him. . . . So, he became scared and made a rope out of some sheets, let himself down through a window, and ran away.

When he arrived home, his father said to him, "You're here again? Get out of here! I don't want to see you anymore."

And his father drove him away.

Now the boy went off and became a soldier. He had a little money, and whenever he was supposed to do guard duty, he greased the hand of one of his superior officers so that he didn't have to do guard duty. However, his money ran out, and one day it was his turn to guard the castle<sup>122</sup> at night. After a half an hour he saw that nobody was in sight. So, he took off his gun and put his coat on top of it and his hat on top of the bayonet. Then he left.

Now let's leave him and turn to the other soldiers. When they saw that the guard was no longer moving or saying, "Halt, who goes there!" they went to him and found the hat, the coat, and the gun but no guard.

122 According to the storyteller, this castle was the Castellammare in Palermo.

So let us now turn back to Don Giuseppe. Actually, I think I said that the boy had been called Peppino, but now that he was grown up, he was called Don Giuseppe. Well anyway, Don Giuseppe set out for the countryside. He walked and walked until he found himself in a forest. Dying of hunger, he looked around to see what he could do. While he was looking, he saw a palace completely made of gold. As he approached it, he saw a goat tied up before the gate. All at once his heart jumped for joy at the thought of killing the goat and cooking it.

But as soon as the goat realized it was about to be grabbed, it said, "Don't kill me. I've been baptized and confirmed just like you!"

When he heard the goat talk, he was stunned and became frightened.

"How did you get in this situation?" he said.

"How did I get into this situation? Well, I can't tell you right now. But let me tell you what you must do. You're to go inside, where you'll find a table already set. Eat to your heart's content, and when you return, we can talk."

He went up into the palace, found a beautiful table already set, sat down, and ate like a prince. When he was full, he went back outside to the goat, who said to him: "I've been enchanted, and I can't leave here. I was the daughter of a king, and everyone called me 'Beauty of the Seven Mountains of Gold.' "

"What has to be done to free you?" Don Giuseppe asked.

"What has to be done? I need a courageous man."

"Well, if you want a courageous man, you want Don Giuseppe. Tell me what to do!"

"You've got to go back up into the castle, and in one of the rooms you'll find a magnificent bed, already made up. Then all you have to do is to get undressed and get into bed. When you are about to fall asleep, three kings dressed in gold will appear and say to you: 'How dare you come up into the castle and get into this bed?' But you're not to make a peep. 'Speak up! Listen!' one of them will say, 'Who's sent you? What's your name?' Again you're not to respond to them, otherwise you'll be cast under a spell, just like I was. When they see that you won't talk, they will threaten you and pretend that they want to kill you. But it is all bluff. Don't be frightened. Then they will treat you gently and take you to a room filled with gold, just to make you talk. But you must remain firm! And no matter whether they do this or that to you, don't be scared. Even if they put you into a kettle of boiling oil, it won't harm you because at the end they'll spread an ointment on you, and you'll return better looking and more fit than ever before."

That night everything happened as the goat said it would. As soon as the three kings saw that Don Giuseppe did not want to talk, they threw him into a kettle of boiling oil. But Don Giuseppe who knew everything in advance, let

them do it. He was killed; he was thrown into the oil, but then he became more handsome than ever before. When he woke up, he found himself in the bed fresh as a rose.

Incidentally, I forgot to say that the goat had three beautiful veils that covered her face.

When Don Giuseppe awoke, he couldn't find his clothes. Instead, there was a suit adorned with gold and silver. Immediately after he stood up, his first thought was to go down and see the goat. He found her minus one of the veils, and she had the face of a lady, but her arms and the rest of her body were that of a goat. When she saw him, she celebrated and said, "I'm so blessed that you were sent to me! Tell me, who sent you to free me, dear Don Giuseppe?" Then she added: "Go and eat, and later we can talk."

So, Don Giuseppe went to eat and then came back from the palace.

"Listen to me carefully," the goat said. "Tonight you'll have to go and sleep in the same bed as yesterday. Once again they'll make many threats and do other things. But you are to keep your eyes open and not say a word. They will torture you and tear you to pieces, but don't be afraid because they can't do anything to you."

That night Don Giuseppe got undressed and went to bed. Immediately thereafter, the three kings arrived.

"What's your name? . . . Who sent you here? . . . He's certainly stubborn! . . . Talk . . . This one deserves to die!"

All three kept saying things, but Don Giuseppe kept looking at them with his eyes open and without speaking. When they saw how firm he was, they ordered him to be torn to pieces—and they made a pickled tuna fish out of him. Then they spread an ointment on him, and he became more handsome than ever before.

When he awoke, Don Giuseppe said, "Gentlemen, I thank you!" and he felt himself reinvigorated. When he got out of bed, he couldn't find his suit from the day before. Instead there was a blue suit adorned with gold. He got dressed, and his first thought was to go and see the goat. When he found her, she was now a lady from her head to the waist. But her legs and feet were those of a goat. There was only one veil over her face. Just think of how happy the goat was to see him in his clothes and herself almost a lady!

I forgot to mention this, but there was a handkerchief lined with silver in the first suit, and Don Giuseppe had given it to the goat and had said, "I want you to keep this!" And she kept it. The second night there was another handkerchief lined with gold, and this, too, he gave to her, and she saved it.

It's impossible to say how happy she was or to tell how she felt. She never tired of saying: "The Lord sent you to free me!" Then she added: "Tonight

will be worse than all the others so you've got to pay attention because the three kings will bring servants with them carrying kitchen spits, and they'll stick them into you as if you were a sausage to roast on a grill. But don't be afraid because they will use a certain ointment to make you become more handsome than ever before. But stay alert and don't talk!"

Don Giuseppe went up into the palace. He ate in peace, got undressed, and went to sleep. While he was sleeping, the three kings, who were marvelously dressed, appeared and tried to intimidate him. "Now you're finished!" they said. "Your life is no longer yours!"

Then one of them turned to him and said, "Just wait! But, before we kill you, you must get up and come with us!"

He got up, and they took him to the room where there was a lot of dirt.

"Take a fistful!" one of the kings said.

Don Giuseppe took a fistful in his hand, and it became a bunch of gold.

"You see," the king said, "this entire room is yours. You only have to tell me your name and who sent you here."

But Don Giuseppe remained firm and looked him in the eyes without speaking. So, when the kings saw this, they had a furnace lit and ordered four men to slice him like a sausage and throw him into the fire. Finally, they took a bottle and spread ointment on him, and he became more handsome and vigorous than ever before. Afterward they put him back into the bed, and he fell into a deep sleep.

When it turned day, he saw that he was more handsome than ever before. Then he went to get dressed and found a white suit lined with gold and ornamented with precious stones and a white handkerchief ornamented the same way. After he descended, he went to the goat and found a young lady as beautiful as the sun. As soon as she saw him appear, she said, "Oh, Don Giuseppe, you are the one who has freed me from these chains!"

In turn, he took the white handkerchief and gave it to her.

The maiden was now dressed in the clothes of a princess that she had on when she had been carried off by the fairies from the royal palace. "Don Giuseppe," she said to him, "There's no time to lose. Let's be off!"

They went to the stable, gathered provisions of food and money, and took two handsome horses. Then they jumped onto the saddles, and as they were leaving, they heard a huge roar: "Boom!" The palace crumbled. The ground opened, and everything disappeared. The only thing that remained was clean open space.

They set out, and in the forest they couldn't decide which path to take. They rode and rode and became separated from another. Don Giuseppe found his way to an inn, and nearby there was a church. He took lodgings at

the inn where he told an old woman who was serving the food what had happened. She pretended not to understand anything. The next day Don Giuseppe went into the church. While he was hearing the mass, the old witch arrived and stuck a hair pin into his head. Immediately, Don Giuseppe fell asleep. And who do you suppose entered at that very moment? The Beauty of the Seven Mountains! She approached and found him asleep. "Don Giuseppe, Don Giuseppe!" She tugged at him, but couldn't wake him from his deep sleep. Then she left behind one of the handkerchiefs that she had given him as a sign.

When Don Giuseppe woke up and saw the handkerchief, he said, "Poor me! What am I to do? Where can I find her?"

The next day, as if the princess had said to him, "go into the church," he went into the church. The old witch returned with the hair pin, and she stuck him a second time. Beauty returned and was not able to wake him. So she left another handkerchief. In short, this happened three consecutive times. The third day the princess departed and left a letter with these exact words: "Dear Don Giuseppe, since I haven't been able to wake you, I'm leaving for my father's kingdom. I shall expect you in a year, a month, and a day. I'm leaving one more handkerchief for you that you should find useful."

After a long journey the princess reached her father's kingdom. As soon as her ship entered the port, she was greeted by a salvo of guns just as it was done for royal ships.<sup>123</sup> The king asked who had arrived, and as soon as he heard that it was his daughter, he and the queen ran to meet her. Just think of the great celebration that was held after the princess had been missing for so long! She told them all that had happened, how the fairies had carried her off, how she had become a goat, how the courageous Don Giuseppe had helped her become a lady again, and all the rest.

Once her story spread throughout the world, many princes arrived to ask for her hand in marriage. However, she always responded no, because she was engaged to Don Giuseppe.

"But, my daughter," her mother said, "you must understand that we cannot live forever. 'If the young can die, the old cannot live,' as they say. One day or another we shall die, and who will take over the kingdom?"

The maiden asked for some more time and said, "I'll only get married after a year, a month, and a day have passed since my return."

Now let us turn to Don Giuseppe, who could find no peace of mind ever

123 Pitrè commented, "The storyteller recalled that the cannon salvo in honor of the princess when she arrived in the city was like the one that kings' ships receive when they arrive in the port.—The Sicilian people are deeply monarchical. It's in their blood."

since he had become separated from his Beauty of the Seven Mountains of Gold. He wandered here and there, and after one year and twenty-nine days he arrived at the coast near the city of his beloved and saw a fisherman with a small boat. He was going fishing, and Don Giuseppe approached him and asked, "Good man, what are you doing?"

"What am I doing? I'm going fishing."

"Wait a moment!"

"I can't wait because the king's daughter is getting married tomorrow, and the king has ordered that all the fish that are caught are to be brought to the royal palace."

"Could you tell me how I can get to the royal palace?"

"Yes, my lord, come with me."

After the fisherman showed him the way to the royal palace, Don Giuseppe went for a walk on the esplanade but did not see anyone. The next day he did this again, and let me tell you, he walked back and forth a thousand times, and that's not an exaggeration!

But let's now turn to the princess. She, too, could not find any peace of mind and constantly looked out at the esplanade to see whether anyone had arrived. Indeed, he was there, but she didn't realize that it was Don Giuseppe. Then, at a certain moment, it dawned on him that she was looking at him, and so what did he do? He took out the black handkerchief and displayed it. As soon as she saw it, she said, "Oh, that's Don Giuseppe!"

He answered by putting away the black handkerchief and taking out the blue one. She took a closer look and said, "Oh! That's Don Giuseppe!"

Finally he took out the white handkerchief adorned with gold and precious stones. She saw it and said, "There's no time to lose!" She called to one of the ladies of the court to ask him to come up to her, and his heart jumped with joy. He mounted the stairs, and the Beauty of the Seven Mountains of Gold went toward him. They recognized each other and embraced. Just imagine the scene!

At this point the mother arrived and said, "Who is this? What's going on here?"

"Ah, mother, this is the man who freed me from the evil spell!"

Then she took Don Giuseppe into the throne room and told her mother everything. The prince who was supposed to marry the Beauty of the Seven Mountains of Gold was also there, and he renounced his claim. He understood that Don Giuseppe had the right to marry Beauty because he had saved her.

All the preparations that had been made for this prince were now changed to serve Don Giuseppe. The priest was present, and to the delight and

pleasure of the king, queen, and their entire court, Don Giuseppe wed the Beauty of the Seven Mountains of Gold.

They remained happy, content and in peace  
While we're still here picking our teeth.

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 85. THE MERCHANT

**I**t's been told that there was once a merchant who had a son, and he sent him to school. His bad friends told him to steal some money from his father, and he brought it to this crooked gang. After a year of such a life, his father found that he was missing seven hundred coins, and since he thought that it was his wife who had taken the money, he gave her a beating. But the poor woman didn't know anything. Later the father learned that his son was the thief (for the father went to the tavern and saw that his son was gambling and lost a lot of money). Indeed, he took a stick and gave him quite a beating. So, the son ran away and went to his godfather, who loved him very much. Well, this godfather went to his friend's house and asked him to forgive his son.

"You can settle him down, my friend," he said, "by sending him to school in Naples, where my godson will teach him, and he'll move on with his life."

So the father gave his son an allowance of three tari a day because he wanted him to live well, and his son departed. At Naples he spent all the money that he had for the year within four months, and the teacher didn't know what to do. He wrote to his godfather and told him that the boy was talented and was making progress with his studies, but he did not have enough money. Immediately the godfather sent a hundred coins. Within four days, the young man gambled away the money with his friends and was left without any money. What could the teacher do? On the one hand, he gave him something to eat, on the other, he wrote again to the parents of the young man to let them know that their son was making so much progress that the king had made a big deal out of him and promoted him to commander of the navy and army of the Kingdom of Naples. When the father and his friend read these letters, they had the garments of a general made for him, gathered together another 200 coins, and sent them to the young man. However, he took the money and gambled it away at the taverns. Within a space of six months he also gambled away the garments, and the young man was

left poor and crazed. The teacher turned his back on him and sent him packing.

The young man went out to seek his fortune, and he traveled a long time until he came to the city of London. He spent the night beneath the balcony of a palace and heard some music. Somebody let a silk ladder drop from a window. A cavalier dressed in white grabbed hold of it and climbed up to the window where the daughter of a merchant was waiting for him, and the cavalier entered. At daybreak he went away. That same day Don Antonio, the merchant's son, begged for three coins, bought some white garments, and in the evening, when the music was played, he pretended to be the cavalier from the night before and climbed the silk ladder. The maiden fell in love with him, gave him a lot of money (for she had heaps of money), and said to him: "Take the money, and buy yourself clothes. Buy a palace at the Quattro Cantoni,<sup>124</sup> and return here tomorrow night."

The next night Don Antonio returned and was dressed as a gallant cavalier. This time the maiden gave him a sack of money to provide the palace with new furnishings including things for the kitchen. Then he was to purchase a beautiful carriage with handsome horses and coachmen.

The next day Don Antonio did everything that she told him to do. When he saw that nothing was lacking, he took the maiden's advice and went to the merchant, her father, and asked him to dine with him. The merchant, overwhelmed by such grand ceremony, went to Don Antonio's palace, where he had a splendid meal. Afterward Don Antonio sent him home in one of his carriages. The next day the merchant invited this gracious and talented young man, and in order to impress him, he borrowed the king's table, for the king was a friend of his. And when he arrived, Don Antonio asked, "I gather your lordship doesn't have any family."

(To trick her father, the maiden did not attend the dinner with them.)

"I'm embarrassed," he said. "I have a daughter."

"Well, then, I'm leaving . . ."

The daughter had herself summoned by her father to come to the table because he said to her, "Come immediately to the table. If not, you'll get a beating!"

The maiden pretended never to have seen Don Antonio. She ate with them. Toward ten in the evening the merchant sent the young man back to his palace

124 Pitre explained that this was a square called the "Four Corners" in the center of Palermo. The storyteller could only think of this grand place in Palermo because of its splendor, and she cites it as a popular square in the center of London, as the only place she can imagine. The Quattro Cantoni was so well known in Palermo that it was celebrated in folk songs.

with grand ceremony. Later that evening Don Antonio climbed into the maiden's room to enjoy the fruits of love.<sup>125</sup>

"Tomorrow," the merchant's daughter said, "I want you to go and ask my father to marry me."

The next day, Don Antonio arrived in a gallant carriage and went to the merchant.

"Signor merchant," he asked, "if you please, I would like to request the hand of your daughter."

"It would be my greatest pleasure," the merchant responded. "At noon I'll go and discuss this with my daughter. If you return here at ten this evening, I shall give you my answer."

To be brief, within a week, Don Antonio was married to the merchant's daughter, and the merchant gave a great dowry to his daughter.

After they were together for four years, Don Antonio went to his wife and said, "I'd like to go and see my father who lives in Palermo, and I have to pass through Naples because I am the commander of the navy and army of the King of Naples."

"You can be that here. So, wait," his wife responded. "I'm going to speak to my father, who'll arrange it so that you can become commander of the navy and army for the city of London."

And so she went to her father, who went to his friend, the King of London. Since the king did not want to displease his friend, he sent Don Antonio the medals of the commander. So now, Don Antonio remained for a while. However, later he insisted on departing for Palermo and took a coach to the harbor. Before he reached the ship, however, the coachman threw him from a bridge, turned the coach around, and carried off the cash-box. After Don Antonio watched the coach disappear, he went to the ship and departed for Palermo. When he arrived, he went to his godfather, who organized a celebration for him.

"And how are my mother and father?" Don Antonio asked.

"Ohh, my son!" he responded. "They have been reduced to poverty and are staying at a warehouse at the gate of St. Anthony."<sup>126</sup>

"Please go there, godfather," Don Antonio said, "and tell them that I want to see them."

The godfather departed to see his friend, and he said, "Friend, I've come from your son Ninu. What do you say about that?"

125 In Sicilian, *si manciannu quattru fila di pasta*, which means "to eat four different kinds of pasta."

126 Outside of Palermo at the gate of Saint Antonio there were many warehouses for traders and mule drivers who came from all parts of Italy.

"Nothing, my friend. Don't talk to me about him!"

"All right, have it your way. If I find your son, I'll bring him here to you because he's my godson."

"If my son wants to come to Palermo, that's his choice, but I don't want him under my roof. Let him go and tend the pigs at Saint Erasmo."<sup>127</sup>

His friend laughed and laughed, and then he went and told his godson.

"Well then, I'm going to Saint Erasmo to tend the pigs," his godson said, and he went and became the swineherd there.

When he was young, he knew how to play the pipe, and he played and played and taught the pigs how to march, and they moved as if they were an army off to war. One day, the news about these pigs reached the king, and he asked who it was that taught the pigs to do things with the whistle of a pipe. When he found out, he said, "This young man has a good head on his shoulders. Tell him that if he comes and trains my soldiers with his pipe, I'll make him commander of the navy and army."

And he made him the commander.

Now let's leave them there, and turn to the wife of Don Antonio, who decided to go and seek her husband when he didn't return. She took a large sum of money, her wedding dress, and chambermaids, and departed for Palermo. Once she arrived, she learned that Don Antonio's father and mother had the warehouse at St. Antonio. So she went there. At noon, she invited them to eat with her. While they were eating, she said to the father, "Don't you have any children?"

"Yes, I have one," he replied, "and he was so ornery that he reduced me to poverty."

"Well, I'd like to see him," the stranger said. "Send someone to fetch him."

"Let's drop the subject. He's just a mere swineherd right now," the father said.

"But please have him come here," she replied. "I'd like to see him."

The father sent someone to fetch him, while the stranger had them go shopping and they bought a delicious cake. When the young man arrived, he didn't recognize her. She distributed the food, and she gave a great deal of the cake to Don Antonio. Meanwhile, the father kept saying, let him go, this swineherd. He doesn't deserve it."

When they were finished eating, the stranger put on her wedding dress. As soon as Don Antonio saw her, he recognized her and embraced her. His garments were also ready, and he got dressed in the uniform of the commander

127 A place in Palermo.

of the King of London and the King of Naples. Immediately they turned to his parents.

"Come bless us, Papa. Come bless us, Mama."

"This is my husband."

"This is my wife."

And they told everything that had happened in the past. Everyone was content, and the daughter-in-law gave her in-laws and the godfather a great deal of money. After some days they departed for London, and they always lived in peace.

They remained husband and wife

And we remain lost in life.

*Told by the teacher Vincenzo Restivo and collected by Gaetano Di Giovanni in Ciaciana.*

## 86. THE UNFORTUNATE PRINCESS

Once, so it's been told, there was a king and a queen who had seven daughters. The youngest was called Misfortune. One day, war was declared against the king. After he was defeated, they took away his throne and threw him into prison. Now that the king was a prisoner, the queen was forced to leave the palace and to live in a modest house. The family's fortunes were ruined and became so bad that they barely had anything to eat.

One day a fruit dealer passed by, and the queen called him in order to buy two figs. While she was buying these figs, an old woman passed by and asked for some alms.

"Ah, grandmother," the queen said to her. "If I could, I would gladly show you charity. But I can't because I'm poor."

"How did you become so poor?" the old woman asked.

"Oh, grandmother, don't you know that I'm the queen of Spain? When war was declared against my husband and he was defeated, our fortunes fell."

"You poor soul! You're right! But don't you know why things have turned upside down for you? One of your daughters living in your home has been struck by bad luck, and you won't be able to regain your former grand stature as long as she is with you."

"You mean I must send my daughter away?"

"Yes, my lady."

“And who is the unlucky one among my daughters?”

“It is the one who sleeps with her hands crossed. Tonight you are to go with a candle to look at your daughters. The one who is sleeping with her hands crossed is the one that you must send away. If you do this, you’ll be able to win back the realm that you’ve lost.”

At midnight the queen took a lamp and walked by the beds of her daughters. None of them had their hands crossed except her youngest, Misfortune.

“Ah, my daughter, must it be you that I have to send away?!”

While she was saying this, Misfortune awoke and saw her mother in tears.

“What’s wrong, mother?” she asked.

“Nothing, my daughter. An old woman came and told me that I could regain our former grand stature, but only if I sent away the unfortunate daughter who sleeps with her hands crossed . . . and this unfortunate daughter is you!”

“And this is why you’re crying?” Misfortune said. “I’ll get dressed right now and leave.”

So she dressed herself, packed a bundle of things, and departed. She walked and walked until she reached a desolate spot where there was just a cottage, and she heard that someone inside was weaving. She looked inside, and one of the weavers said, “Do you want to enter?”

“Yes, my lady,” responded Misfortune.

“Do you want to work for us?”

“Yes, my lady,” and she began to sweep the floor and clean.

That evening the women said to her, “Listen, Misfortune, we are going to leave the house tonight. When we are outside, you are to lock the door behind us. When we return, you’re to open the door for us. But pay attention and make sure that nobody robs the silk, the lace, or anything else that we’ve woven.”

Then they left. Toward midnight Misfortune heard the noise of scissors and saw a woman cutting off all the gold stuff from the loom. It was her Evil Fate.

The next day the women returned, and she opened the door for them. When they entered and saw everything on the ground, they cried out, “Ah, you disgraceful thing! So, this is the reward for everything we’ve done for you! . . . Get out!”

And they kicked her out.

After this disastrous adventure, Misfortune began walking through the countryside. Before she came to a village, she stopped in front of a tavern where they sold bread, vegetables, wine, and many other things. She asked for some alms, and the tavern owner gave her a nice piece of bread, cheese, and a

glass of wine. That night, since she felt sorry for Misfortune, she let her sleep among the sacks in the tavern. Her husband made a place for her. They ate and then went to sleep. But that night all hell broke loose. The barrels were all uncorked, and the wine ran all over the house. When the husband saw what had happened, he got up and noticed that the girl was there: "Ah, you disgraceful thing! It must have been you!"

So, he took a stick, hit her over the head with it, and sent her away.

The poor girl wept and kept moving on, not knowing where to go and what to do. When it turned day, she came across a woman who was washing clothes in the countryside.

"What are you looking at?" the woman asked.

"I'm lost."

"Do you know how to wash clothes?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Well then, stay here, and help me. I'll soap the clothes, and you rinse them in the water."

So she began to rinse the clothes in the water and then to hang them up. As soon as they were dry, she gathered them and mended them. Finally, she starched and ironed them. These clothes belonged to the prince. As soon as he saw them, they appeared to have been beautifully washed.

"Signora Francesca, tell me, how come you've never done such a fine job before! I'm going to reward you for this."

And he gave her ten gold pieces. Signora Francesca took the ten gold pieces and dressed Misfortune in beautiful clean clothes and bought a sack of flour. Then she made bread and two beautiful buns filled with anise seeds and sesame seeds that seemed to say, "Eat me, eat me!"

The next day the woman said to Misfortune, "Take these two buns and go to the seashore where you're to call for my Fate three times: 'Oh, Fate of Signora Francesca!' The third time, when my Fate appears, you are to give her a bun and greet her from me. Then ask her where your Fate is, and she'll let you know where she is."

Click-clack went her shoes as Misfortune made her way to the seashore.

"Oh, Fate of Signora Francesca! Oh, Fate of Signora Francesca! Oh, Fate of Signora Francesca!"

Then Signora Francesca's Fate appeared, and Misfortune passed on the greeting and gave her the bun.

"Fate of Signora Francesca," she added, "will you now please be so kind as to tell me where my Fate is?"

"Listen to what you must do: take this path, walk for a good while until you come to an oven. Next to the hearth there will be an old witch. Touch her

gently and give her the bun. She is your Fate. Be aware that she will treat you rudely and won't accept the bun. But you are to leave it with her anyway and then depart."

Misfortune went to the oven, found the old woman, and was somewhat horrified to see her so dirty, stinking, slimy, and ugly. Nevertheless, she gave her the bun and said, "Oh my Fate, this is for you."

"Get out of here! Get out of here! I don't want any bread!" the old woman said, and she turned away from Misfortune, who placed the bun beside her and went back to the house of Signora Francesca.

The next day was the beginning of the week, and she began to wash the clothes. Signora Francesca moistened them and soaped them, while Misfortune washed and rinsed them in water. When they were dry, Misfortune starched and ironed them. Then Signora Francesca put them into a basket and brought them to the palace.

As soon as the prince saw them, he said, "Signora Francesca, what's the story here? You've never washed and ironed my clothes like this before!" And he gave her a gift of ten gold coins.

Signora Francesca bought some more flour and made two more buns for the Fates and intended to send Misfortune to deliver them. The young princess was also to take a bun to her own Fate and to treat her kindly—to wash her, comb her, even if she had to use a little force.

But first they had to wash the clothes. When they were done, Signora Francesca brought them to the prince who was soon to be married. He was very happy that the clothes were done so well and gave her twenty gold coins as a reward. Signora Francesca went immediately to buy some flour to make more bread and to purchase a beautiful dress with a crinoline and gown, a comb, an ointment, and other gifts for Misfortune's Fate. Then, she made a bun, and Misfortune brought it to the old woman.

"Oh, my Fate, this bun is for you!"

After the old woman grabbed it, Misfortune washed her with a sponge and soap and combed her nicely.

"Listen, Misfortune," the old woman said, "because you have been so good to me, I'm going to give you this small box. Mind you, it will serve you well."

It was a small box used for keeping wax matches. Misfortune ran back to Signora Francesca's house, opened the box, and found some lace.

"Ah!" she said. "I thought that this is what it would be!" and she threw it into the bottom drawer of a chest.

The next week they washed some other clothes, and Signora Francesca carried them to the palace. The prince was distressed because his bride's dress was missing some lace, and the exact kind of lace was nowhere to be found in

his kingdom. When Signora Francesca entered, she said, "What's the matter?"

(Of course, Signora Francesca enjoyed the confidence of the prince.)

"What's the matter? I'm supposed to get married, and my bride's wedding dress is missing some lace that cannot be found anywhere!"

"This is no reason for your majesty to get so upset? Just let me take care of this."

And what did she do? She went home, took out the piece of lace that had been thrown into the chest of drawers, and brought it to him. After he measured it, he found it to be perfect.

Then the prince said, "Since you've saved the day, I want to pay you with as much gold as this lace weighs."

So, he took a scale and placed the lace on one plate and some gold on another. However, the plate with the lace did not rise up at all. So he took a steelyard to measure the lace's weight, and the same thing happened.

"Signora Francesca, you're not telling me the whole story. It's not possible for a piece of lace to weigh as much as this does. Where does it come from?"

Signora Francesca was now obliged to tell the king about everything that had happened. So the king wanted to see Misfortune, and Signora Francesca had her get dressed in beautiful clean clothes that she had bought and then took her to the palace. As soon as Misfortune entered the royal throne room—and we must remember that she had proper manners because she was the daughter of a king—she made a beautiful curtsy. The prince greeted her and had her sit down. Then he asked, "Who are you?"

"I am Misfortune, the youngest daughter of the King of Spain, who was dethroned and put into prison. My Evil Fate made me wander the world, and wherever I went, I was treated badly and beaten."

And she told him everything. So the young king summoned the women, who had woven the lace that the Evil Fate had torn to pieces with the scissors, and asked them how much the lace cost. They told him that the lace cost two hundred gold coins. In turn, he gave them the two hundred gold coins and added, "I want you to know that this poor maiden you treated so poorly is the daughter of a king. Think about this the next time you treat anyone badly! You're dismissed!"

Then he summoned the innkeeper whose barrels of wine had been uncorked and asked him how much the damage was.

"Three hundred gold coins."

The king paid him three hundred gold coins and said, "If something like this happens another time and you mistreat a daughter of the king, you'll receive the same kind of treatment! You're dismissed!"

Finally, he sent his intended bride away because she no longer suited him, and he married Misfortune instead. In addition, Signora Francesca was made a lady of the court.

Now let us leave the happy young king and return to Misfortune's mother. After the departure of her daughter, the wheel of fortune turned in her favor so that one day her brother and her nephews arrived with strong reinforcements to reconquer the kingdom. The queen and her daughters went back to live in the old palace with all its beautiful comforts, but they always were tormented because they could never discover what had happened to Misfortune. As soon as they were able to do so, they sent messengers out to search for her until they finally came into contact with one another. All this happened because the prince heard that Misfortune's mother had regained the kingdom, and he sent his own messengers to bring her news of Misfortune.

Just imagine how happy her mother was! She traveled to the prince's palace with the ladies of her court accompanied by cavaliers, and when she found her daughter again, she squeezed her in a long embrace. Then her sisters also arrived, and just imagine how happy they were, too! Everyone celebrated throughout the kingdom—and they remained happy and content.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 87. DON GIOVANNI MISIRANTI

I've heard tell that there once was a man named Don Giovanni Misiranti in Palermo who kept looking for bread during the day and a cover for his head at night. One day, he became desperate, and as he left his house, he said, "Oh my fate! Look at how you've abandoned me!"

And he started out walking, and while he was walking, he came across a beautiful bean. So he bent down and picked it up. Nearby there was a large rock, and Don Giovanni Misiranti sat down on it and said, "Now that I've found this bean, I'll plant it. And this bean will produce a plant with lots of pods. Then I'll dry the little pods, and during the year I'll plant them in a large pot. Then they'll produce many pods that I can gather with a shovel . . . After three years I'll rent a garden where I'll plant these beans, and there's no telling how many beans I'll have! After four years I'll rent me a shop and become a great merchant."

When he finally felt an urge, he got up from the rock and continued

walking and walking toward Saint Anthony's Gate. There he saw a line of shops and a woman sitting in front of the door to one of them.

"Good woman," he said, "are these shops for rent?"

"Yes, sir," she responded. "Who would like to rent them?"

"My patron," Don Giovanni said to her. "Can you tell me who the owner is so I can contact him?"

"The lady who lives upstairs is the owner."

Don Giovanni began thinking about his next step and went off to see his close companion.

"My friend," he said, "for the sake of Saint John and our friendship, please don't refuse my request. You must lend me one of your suits for twenty-four hours."

"Of course, my friend."

Don Giovanni dressed himself appropriately and even wore a watch and gloves. Then he went to the barber to have himself shaved. When he was all spruced up, he went to Saint Anthony's Gate. As soon as he saw the woman, he pretended to be a gentleman and said, "Good woman, the other day my servant came to inform himself whether these shops were for rent."

"Yes, my lord. Would you like to look at them now? Please, my lord, come with me, and I'll take you to the wife of the owner."

With his chest puffed out like a rooster, "the lord" Don Giovanni, smartly dressed, went upstairs with the woman and entered into the home of the owner of the shops. When the lady saw this gentleman with a hat, gloves, and a gold chain, she greeted him ceremoniously. As they were talking, a beautiful young woman passed through the room. Don Giovanni looked at her and decided something by himself.

"Who is that young woman?" he asked.

"My daughter," the lady responded.

"Is she married?"

"No, she's single."

"That pleases me. I'm single, too." And after a while he said, "Perhaps we may pass now from talking about business affairs to discussing the affairs of your daughter. What do you think about that, my lady?"

"Everything is possible," the lady replied to him.

When her husband arrived, Don Giovanni arose and paid his respects: "I am a landowner and would like to rent thirteen of your shops to fill them with beans, chickpeas, and other crops. Moreover, if you find me suitable, I'd like to have your daughter as my wife."

"And you, what's your name?"

"I'm called Don Giovanni Misiranti, dealer of chickpeas and beans, among other things."

"Well then, Don Giovanni, give me twenty-four hours to think it over, and then I'll give you my answer."

Don Giovanni returned to his friend and had him lend him a different suit, and he conserved the bean that he found, and it was already germinating. That evening, the lady called her daughter to her and spoke with her. She said that Don Giovanni wanted her for his wife and that he was a dealer in beans, chickpeas, and so on, and so on. Her daughter said, "yes," and the day after Don Giovanni had his response from the parents, and he felt as if he were in seventh heaven and touched the bean in his pocket.<sup>128</sup>

"Well then," he said, "I'd like to do things quickly because my affairs don't permit me to waste time."

"Of course, Don Giovanni," responded the father and mother. "If you like, we'll draw up the contract for the marriage to take place next week."

The next day, Don Giovanni, who was extremely content, returned to his friend to borrow another suit. Upon seeing that he changed his suit every day, his future mother-in-law commented, "Truly, this Don Giovanni must be a great merchant. Just look how he dresses."

Indeed, it was only because they had not signed a marriage contract yet that Don Giovanni wore a new suit every day. Soon they agreed upon a dowry that was two thousand ounces of gold in ready cash along with a bed and linen. When Don Giovanni saw the money, he felt reborn and went on a shopping spree. With the two thousand ounces he bought a gift for his fiancée and clothes for himself so he could dress like a great lord. In addition, he organized the celebrations. A week after signing the contract, Don Giovanni, who did not own a thing, married the maiden in a great ceremony, and he always kept the bean in his pocket. Now Don Giovanni led the life of a baron. After two weeks of spending his mother-in-law became disturbed and said to him, "Don Giovanni, when are you going to take my daughter to your domains? It's now harvest time, you know."

Don Giovanni felt the blood rush to his head. So he took out the bean and asked, "Ah, my fate, when are you going to help me?"

Soon he had a beautiful sedan chair on wheels prepared for his wife and his mother-in-law and said to them, "It's time to depart. Let's go to Messina. I'll ride ahead of you on horseback. You'll follow me, and I'll tell you where to meet me."

128 The bean possessed magic powers.

Don Giovanni got on a horse and left. When the moment seemed opportune, he stopped at the first good place where he encountered a peasant. "Take these twelve coins," he called out to him. "As soon as you see a sedan chair with two women and they ask you who the owner of this land is, you're to say: 'It belongs to Giovanni Misiranti, lord of the chickpeas and beans, and so on and so on.'"

The sedan chair arrived.

"Good man, who owns these beautiful fields?"

"Don Giovanni Misiranti, dealer in the chickpeas and beans."

The mother was very happy. They arrived at another estate and received the same answer. Don Giovanni rode ahead giving gifts of twelve coins and touching the bean in his pocket. Then he arrived at a place where there was nothing more to see, and Don Giovanni said to himself, "Now I don't have anything more to show them. So, I'll look for an inn where I can rest."

He turned around and saw a large palace with a young woman sitting at a window.

"Pss, pss," the maiden whispered.

When Don Giovanni heard himself being called, he went and climbed the stairs into the palace. Since he was dripping with sweat, he was afraid he might dirty the steps, they were so clean and sparkling. The young woman met him and showed him the great chandeliers, the great carpets, and a wall of gold coins.

"Do you like this palace?"

"How could I not like it?" said Don Giovanni. "I wouldn't mind dying here."

"Climb the stairs and look around."

And at the door she showed him another floor that had rooms filled with clothes, precious stones, things that Don Giovanni had never dreamed of.

"Do you see these things? They are yours and your wife's. Here is the deed to the palace. I'm rewarding you because I'm the bean that you kept safely in your pocket. You knew how to look after it. And now I shall take my leave."

Don Giovanni turned to throw himself at her feet and thank her, but she had vanished. He ran to the balcony and leaned out. Since the sedan chair was approaching, his mother-in-law looked out and saw Don Giovanni.

"Ah, my daughter, what great luck you've had! Look at the magnificent palace that your husband has."

When they entered, the mother-in-law said, "Don Giovanni, is this splendid palace yours?"

"What do you think?"

And the mother kissed her daughter out of joy and was bursting with

pride. Enough said. Don Giovanni took them on a tour of the palace. He showed them the jewels and the deed to the domains. Afterward he opened a cellar where there were heaps of gold and silver. Then he showed them the carriages, the lackeys, and all the servants. All these things had been produced through magic. Finally, he wrote to his father-in-law and told him to sell everything and give a reward to Cicuzza, the woman whom Don Giovanni had found sitting before the door of the shop. Afterward his father-in-law was to come to the great palace outside Messina. So, the father-in-law sold everything and went to live with his son-in-law and daughter. Indeed, they lived a rich life and were content to the end of their days.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 88. COUNT JOSEPH PEAR

**T**here were once three brothers who owned a pear tree and lived off their pears. One day one of the brothers went to pick some pears and saw that some had been taken.

“My brothers! What shall we do? Somebody’s picked our pears!”

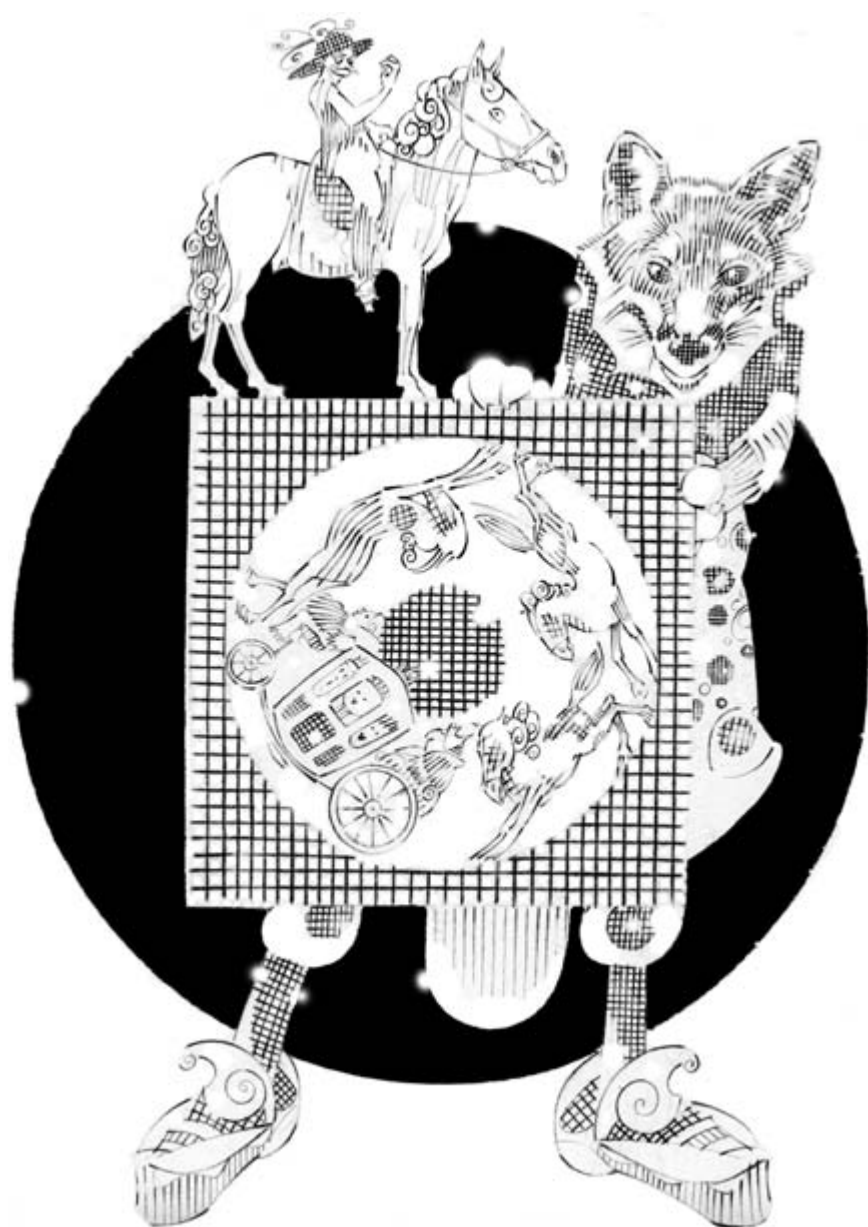
Indeed, they had been stolen, and that night the eldest went to the garden to guard the pear tree. However, he fell asleep, and the next morning the middle brother came and said, “What were you doing, brother? Now look at what’s happened! More pears have been picked. Well, tonight I’m going to stand guard.”

So, that night the second brother was on the lookout. The next morning the youngest brother went to the garden and saw that more of the pears had been picked.

“And you said you were going to keep close watch over everything!” he said to his brother. “Get out of here! Now I’m going to spend the night guarding the tree, and we’ll see whether the thief can pull the wool over my eyes!”

That night, to keep himself awake, the youngest brother began to play and dance under the pear tree. After he stopped for a moment, a female fox, who thought the young man had gone to sleep, came out of a hiding place, climbed the tree, and picked the rest of the pears. As she was coming down the tree, the young man quickly aimed his gun at her and was about to shoot.

“Don’t shoot!” cried the fox. “Please don’t shoot me, Count Joseph. Yes, I’ll see to it that from now on you are called Count Joseph Pear, and that you’ll marry the king’s daughter.”



"But if I let you go, I'll probably never see you again. Besides, as soon as the king sees you, he'll kick you out and make you disappear."

Despite saying all these things, Count Joseph Pear took pity on the fox and let her go. As soon as she went to the forest, the fox caught all sorts of game—squirrels, rabbits, and pheasants—and carried them to the king, who was quite pleased by the sight.

"Your majesty," said the fox, "Count Joseph Pear asked me to bring you this game that he caught."

"Listen, little fox," the king replied, "I'll take this game you brought, even though I've never heard of your Count Joseph Pear before."

The fox left the game there and returned to Count Joseph.

"Listen, Count Joseph, I've taken the first step," the fox reported. "I went to the king with a gift, and he took it."

A week later the fox went to the forest, caught some more animals—squirrels, rabbits, birds—and told Count Joseph he wanted to take them to the king which he did.

"Your majesty, Count Joseph Pear sent me to offer you another present," the fox said.

"Oh, my little fox,"<sup>129</sup> the king replied, "I don't know who this Count Joseph Pear is. I'm afraid your count's been sending you to the wrong king. However, I'll tell you what we'll do: you bring Count Joseph Pear here so I can at least make his acquaintance."

The fox left the game and said, "I'm not mistaken, your majesty. My master sent me here, and in exchange for his generosity, he would like to wed your daughter, the princess."

The little fox<sup>130</sup> returned to Count Joseph and said to him, "Listen, things are going well. After I see the king one more time, the matter will be settled."

"I won't believe you until I have my wife," Count Joseph responded.

Now the fox went back into the forest to an ogress<sup>131</sup> and said, "My friend,<sup>132</sup> my friend, isn't it time for us to divide our money and put the gold coins with the gold and the silver with the silver?"

"Certainly," the ogress said to the fox. "Go fetch a scale so we can weigh and put the gold with the gold and the silver with the silver."

The little fox went to the king, but she didn't say, "The ogress wants to

129 Pitre uses the word *figghia* or daughter.

130 From this point on the storyteller uses "Giuwannuzza," the diminutive of *Giuvanna*, to refer to the fox. According to Pitre's note, this was a traditional usage.

131 *Mamma-draga*, which is a special ogress in Sicily.

132 *Cumari*, *cummari*, which is literally a buddy, good fellow, or companion.

borrow your scale." Instead, she said, "Count Joseph Pear wants to borrow your scale to weigh and divide the gold and silver."

"How did Count Joseph Pear become so wealthy? Is he richer than I am?"

The king gave the fox the scale. When he was alone with his daughter, they talked and talked, and he said to her, "I see that this Count Joseph Pear is very rich because he's weighing and dividing the gold and silver."

In the meantime the fox carried the scale to the ogress, who began to weigh and divide the gold and silver. When she was finished, the fox went to Count Joseph Pear and dressed him in new clothes and gave him a watch with diamonds, some rings, an engagement ring for the princess, and everything that was needed for the marriage.

"Listen to me, Count Joseph Pear," the fox said. "I'm going out before you to prepare the way. You are to go to the king, get your bride, and go to the church."

So Count Joseph went to the king, got his bride, and they went to the church. After they were married, the princess got into the carriage, and the bridegroom mounted his horse. The fox made a sign to Joseph and cried out, "I'll ride ahead, and you follow me. Let the carriages and horses come after."

They started on their way and came to a sheep farm which belonged to the ogress. When the shepherd, who was tending the sheep, saw the fox approach, he threw a rock at her. The fox began to weep.

"Now I'll have you killed!" she said to the shepherd. "Do you see those horsemen behind me? They are mine, and I'll have you killed!"

The shepherd was frightened and said, "If you don't harm me, I won't throw stones at you anymore."

The fox turned and responded, "This is what you must do if you don't want to be killed. When the king passes by and asks you who the owner of the sheep farm is, you must tell him that the farm belongs to Count Joseph Pear. He's the king's son-in-law, and the king will reward you."

Soon the cavalcade passed by, and the king asked the boy, "Who is the owner of this sheep farm?"

"Count Joseph Pear," the shepherd replied, whereupon the king gave him some money.

The fox kept about ten feet in front of Count Joseph, who turned to her and whispered, "Where are you taking me, fox? How can you make them believe that I'm rich? Where are we going?"

"Listen to me," replied the fox. "Leave everything to me."

They went on and on, and the fox saw another farm of cattle with a herdsman. The same thing happened there as with the shepherd. The herdsman

threw a stone, and the fox threatened him. The king passed by and asked, "Herdsman, who owns all these fields?"

"Count Joseph Pear," the herdsman responded, and the king, astonished at his son-in-law's wealth, gave the herdsman a piece of gold.

On the one hand, Joseph was pleased, but on the other, he was confused and wasn't sure how things would end. When the fox turned around, Joseph said, "Where are you taking me, fox? You are going to be the ruin of me."

The fox kept on as if she hadn't heard a thing. Then she came to a horse farm, and the boy who was tending the stallions and mares threw a stone at the fox, who, in turn, frightened him with a threat just as she had done with the others. When the boy saw the king, he said that the farm belonged to Count Joseph Pear.

They kept on traveling, and soon the fox came to a well. The ogress was sitting next to it. The fox began to run and pretended to be tremendously afraid of some rogues.

"Friend! Friend!" she cried out to the ogress. "Do you see them coming after me? Those horsemen will kill us! Quick, let's hide down inside the well."

"Yes, let's do it, friend!" the ogress responded in fear. "We've got to save ourselves."

"Shall I throw you down first?" the fox asked.

"Certainly, friend," the ogress said.

So the fox threw the ogress down the well and then entered her palace. Count Joseph Pear followed the fox with his wife, father-in-law, and all the horsemen. The fox showed them through the apartments, displaying all the riches. Of course, Count Joseph was happy because he had found his fortune, and the king was even happier because his daughter had married a very rich man. There was a celebration for a few days, and then the king, who was most satisfied, returned to his own castle, and his daughter remained with her husband.

One day soon after the king's departure, the fox was looking out the window, and Joseph and his wife were going up to the terrace. Joseph took some dirt and threw it at the fox's head. The fox raised her eyes.

"What's the meaning of this?" she said to Count Joseph. "You're disgusting! Why are you doing this after all the good things that I've done for you? Watch out, or I'll talk!"

"What does the fox have to talk about?" the wife said to Count Joseph.

"Nothing," he said to his wife. "I threw a little dirt at her, and she got angry."

Then Joseph picked up some more dirt and threw it at the fox's head.

The fox became angry and cried out, "Well, little Joey, now I'm going to talk and tell everyone that you're just the common owner of a pear tree."

Joseph became very frightened because the little fox began to tell his wife everything. As she was doing this, he picked up a vase and threw it at the little fox's head, and the vase crushed her skull. Thus Joseph repaid her kindness by killing her, and he continued to enjoy all his wealth with his wife.

But whoever tells this tale, or has it told,  
No dreadful death will ever hold.<sup>133</sup>

*Told by Angela Smiraglia, 18 years old, a villager, in Capa.*

## 89. THE ENCHANTED DOG

**I**'ve heard tell that there was once an old woman who had a beautiful granddaughter. She bought a cylinder of grain and sent her granddaughter to the mill to have the wheat prepared to bake bread. The grandmother had to go to mass and said to her granddaughter, "Take care of the bread, Rosa. When I return, we'll heat up the oven and stick the bread inside."

In the meantime, a dog came, grabbed the bread, and carried it away. When Rosa saw this, she chased after the dog all over the place. Finally, the dog slipped into the palace. The maiden ran inside right after it. Well, inside the palace there was a prince who said, "Oh, I've been expecting you for some time! Now, let's get married."

"Yes, my lord, but I have a grandmother, and I want her here."

The prince took her in a carriage to her home and had her dressed in a beautiful gown.

"I want to sit at my granddaughter's side," the old woman said.

"Of course, you may, granny," the prince responded.

Then the grandmother whispered in Rosa's ear, "What did you do with the bread?"

"Be quiet, granny," Rosa responded.

"What does your granny want?" the prince asked.

133 *E cu' l'ha dittu e cu' l'ha fattu diri  
Di mala morti nun pozza muriri.*

"She wants a gown just like mine."

"I'll have one made right away."

Then they went to sit down at the table to eat, and the grandmother repeated the same thing. "What did you do with the bread?"

"What does your granny want?" the prince asked.

"She wants a ring just like mine."

"I'll have one made right away."

Then the old woman repeated her question once more, "What did you do with the bread?"

"What does your granny want?" the prince asked.

Now the granddaughter could no longer put up with her grandmother and replied, "She wants to be thrown out of that window."

Immediately the prince's servants grabbed hold of her and threw her out the window. And this was how her granddaughter got rid of her. When the old lady was thrown through the window, there was a garden beneath, and at the spot where the grandmother fell, there was a beautiful bower covered with ripe grapes. After having eaten, the prince and his Rosa went into the garden and saw the bower loaded with rare grapes. It was warm, and Rosa began to pick some bugs out of the prince's hair. All of a sudden, a bunch of grapes fell and hit him in the ear causing Rosa to guffaw.

"Why did you laugh the way you did?"

"It was nothing," she replied.

"I want to know why."

But Rosa did not want to tell him, and the prince said, "Either you tell me, or I'll have your head cut off."

"It's because my little chest of jewels is more beautiful than your cloak."

"I want to see it; otherwise I'll have your head cut off."

Compelled to do this, she ran to the dog.

"My dog, you must give me some help."

"Come with me."

Then Rosa said, "Come, my prince. Come with us."

The dog went ahead of them, and they followed him. The dog led them to the old ogre.

"So, you're still here!" the dog said. "The king is coming with his troops to kill you."

There was a well, and they threw the ogre into the well. Soon after, the prince and his wife went to the castle, and they searched and found a chest adorned with gold and a great deal of money and precious gems. They had all the money and precious things loaded into a wagon and brought them to the city.

Now they are happy and content,  
While all our friends are malcontent.

*Told by Felice Sciarrotta, a miner, to G. Di Giovanni at Casteltermini.*

## 90. THE PRINCE AND THE CHARCOAL BURNER

One day, gentlemen, so it's been told, there was a charcoal burner who spent all his days going back and forth into the woods carrying coal with straps. In the meantime, there was a prince from Naples who went on a hunting expedition and entered these woods, and as he walked and walked he became separated from his companions. Later, as he was chasing some game, he fell into a very deep hole. When he landed, he became frightened because he saw a serpent and a large lion right near him, and it appeared that they wanted to eat him. But this was not the case because the lion and the serpent approached him and began licking him. The prince happened to have some tender meat in his game bag and gave them something to eat because they were dying of hunger. And so they ate the meat and caressed the prince.

The poor prince had to spend the night there because he could not climb out of the hole, and the lion and the serpent kept him warm. The next morning, the prince heard someone singing, and the singing was followed by the steps of the charcoal burner who was entering the woods. So, he began to call and shout out for help. When he realized that nobody heard him and nobody responded, he kept shouting until the poor charcoal burner finally responded and traced the voice to the hole.

When the charcoal burner saw the prince, he thought he was some sort of animal and exorcised him. But the prince cried out, "Don't exorcise me. I'm a human and have been baptized. I happened to fall into this hole by mistake and found this lion and serpent who have been very kind to me."

When the charcoal burner heard all this, he asked, "Well, what do you want from me?"

"I want you to rescue me and help me get out of this hole. Moreover, I'd like you to help the animals get out because they appear to have fallen in here by mistake like me."

"As far as you're concerned, we can reach an agreement. But as far as the animals are concerned, I don't feel anything for them."

"If you save my life and free these animals, I'll give you a third of all that I possess."

When the charcoal burner heard this promise, he thought it was a good

idea to say, yes. So he assured him he'd go for help and went straight to the village where he lived. Once there he called for help and fetched rope and a ladder. He also fetched some paper, a pen, and ink and took a friend with him who knew how to read and write. Afterward he returned to the woods with bread, meat, and wine and gave all of this to the prince who divided everything with the lion and the serpent.

After they ate everything, the charcoal burner said to the prince, "I'm going to lower some paper, pen, and ink, and I want you to write all that you promised me if you want to get out of here. When you're done, I'll help you out with the ladder and rope."

So, the prince took the paper and wrote down that he would give the charcoal burner a third of his wealth to reward him for saving his life and the lives of the lion and the serpent. After he signed the paper, he attached it to the rope and told the charcoal burner to pull it up. The charcoal burner retrieved the paper and had his friend read it, and when the friend saw that it was correct, the charcoal burner said, "All right, get out of the way! Make sure you prepare the rope well and tell those animals not to harm anyone; otherwise we'll leave all of you down there." Slowly, slowly the charcoal burner let down the rope that they were to use to tie around themselves. When the serpent saw the rope, it began to wiggle, and once the rope was wrapped around its body, the charcoal burner pulled up the serpent. When the serpent took off the rope, it crawled toward the charcoal burner and stretched out its legs as a sign of gratitude and love. The charcoal burner trembled. But then he lowered the ladder and pulled the lion up slowly but surely, and when the lion found everything was all right, it kneeled before the charcoal burner and began to caress him and lick him with his tongue. The last one to be pulled up was the prince, and as he climbed up the ladder, he put the rope on his back and carried it to the top.

Once they were all settled, they departed for the city, each and every one of them. However, when the people saw the men marching along the road with the lion and the serpent, they became scared. They didn't know how to react, and so they didn't make a sound and ran to safety. When the charcoal burner arrived at his house near the woods, he brought out something to drink for everyone and gave bread and water to the lion and the serpent. After the animals ate and drank, they caressed the prince and the charcoal burner and returned to the woods where they lived. Then the charcoal burner accompanied the prince and delivered him to his parents at the palace, where the prince thanked him and gave him something to eat and drink and then left him. So, without saying anything, the charcoal burner quietly and silently departed from the palace and returned to his village.

Approximately ten days passed, and one night, while the charcoal burner was sleeping, he heard some noise at the door. Someone was knocking. So he got up and went to the window. Well, who do you think was there? It was the lion carrying a hare and goat on his back. The charcoal burner descended and opened the door, and the lion entered and began caressing and licking him. And after leaving the dead animals, the lion turned and went back to the woods. But everyone in the village remained frightened when they learned that the lion had brought the charcoal burner some game to thank him for saving his life.

Another three days passed. Once again, the charcoal burner heard some noise at the door during the night and wondered what it was. When the noise didn't stop, he went to the window, looked out, and to his surprise he saw the serpent knocking on the door with its tail. It was carrying a large stone on its back. So he said to himself, "The poor beast! It wants to show its gratitude by bringing me a gift!" And the charcoal burner went to open the door.

The serpent crawled toward him and placed the stone at his feet. Then it turned around and went back to the woods. So the charcoal burner picked up the stone and kept it in memory of the serpent. Then he returned to his bed, but he was not able to sleep the entire night. He thought and thought and kept thinking about the two animals whose lives he had saved without demanding anything from them, and how they had repaid him each in its way. Yet the prince, who had written down his obligation, had not fulfilled his.

The next day he carried the coal in the morning as he usually did and then went to the city straight to the prince to talk about the gift and to settle matters. At the palace he was met by a servant who went to the prince and told him that there was a charcoal burner who wanted to speak to him, but the prince responded, "I don't know this charcoal burner. Go and see what he wants."

The servant returned to the charcoal burner, and told him what the prince said. In turn, the charcoal burner said, "Go to the prince and tell him that it's the charcoal burner who met him in the woods on a certain day and wants to settle some affairs."

The servant returned to his master and told him everything, but this time the prince became irritated and said, "I don't want to receive the charcoal burner or anyone. If he wants, I'll pay for the coal. Tell him that I don't know him, and if he doesn't leave, I'll set the dogs on him."

The poor messenger returned to the charcoal burner and said, "My son, I advise you to leave because my master is very irritated. If you want to leave the coal here, I'll weigh it and pay what we owe you. If you don't, he told me that he'll set the dogs on you."

When the charcoal burner heard all this, he sent the servant to tell the prince that he was the one who had saved his life and he had it in writing that the prince was to give him a third of all that he possessed. When the servant went to the prince, he became wildly upset when he heard the servant recount the charcoal burner's words. Indeed, the prince wanted to give his servant a beating, if not kill him. So, once again, the servant returned to the charcoal burner, who had become irritated, and said, "Please, go away. I don't want to lose my job on account of you. Moreover, I want you to know that, if you don't leave, I and my companions will have to give you such a beating that you'll be moaning for some time."

When the charcoal burner realized that he couldn't do anything more, he left grumbling about everything and went to bring some coal to his friend, a silversmith. After he deposited the coal, the charcoal burner showed the silversmith the stone that the serpent had given to him as a gift. When the silversmith saw it, he was astounded and cried out, "What's this! Who gave you such a precious stone? Do you realize that you can become very rich with this stone?"

"Yes, I know it," responded the charcoal burner, "and I'm hoping that I can change my condition with this stone, and in a short while I'll bring you the proof."

"But where do you want to go?"

"I'm not going anywhere. I just know what I have to do."

Meanwhile the charcoal burner decided what to do. He took the mules to his house and left them there. Then he went to the royal palace and called out to one of the guards, "Do me a favor and tell the king that I would like an audience with him."

Immediately the guard went to the king who granted him an audience. Then the charcoal burner recounted all that had happened including the promises that were made to him by the prince. Indeed, he showed him the paper on which the prince had written everything down. He also told him about the response he had received from the prince the past day. Finally he told the king about the presents that the lion and serpent had given him and showed him the stone that he wanted to give to the king as a gift.

When the king saw it, he was astonished, for it dazzled his eyes. He accepted the gift and said, "All right, now I'll make sure that you receive justice. Whether the prince wants to or not, he will give you a third of his possessions."

So the king took the charcoal burner and led him to another room where he was told to remain. Then the king called a servant and told him, "Run and tell the prince that I want to see him."

Within a short amount of time, the servant returned with the prince who didn't know what to think.

"I'm at your service, your majesty," the prince said. "What is your command?"

Now the king spoke and asked him whether he recently had some misfortune and whether he had made promises to anyone.

"No, your majesty, I haven't promised anything to anybody, and nothing's happened."

"Try to remember whether you went hunting."

"Ah, yes, it seems that some time ago I fell into a hole, and someone helped me get out, and I paid this person a sufficient amount as a reward."

"And that was it?"

"Nothing more," the prince responded.

"But could it be that you also wrote something on a paper, and could it be that now you don't feel strongly that you should give that person what you promised?"

When the prince heard this, he was convinced that the king had been informed about everything and said, "Your majesty, I didn't write anything to anyone. But it could be that some person or the charcoal burner who saved me might have written some false document. . . ."

But the king interrupted the prince so that he could not continue speaking, and he took out the writing and showed it to him. Then he mortified the prince by ordering the charcoal burner to appear and said, "On the pain of death, you are to give one third of all that you possess to this man right now, and in this way you will release yourself from the obligation to this man who saved your life."

The poor prince had no choice but to give a third of all his possessions to the charcoal burner. Thus, the charcoal burner changed his station in life and brought his family to the city, and the king made him a Knight of Malta.

*Collected by Salvatore Pasquale Vigo in Acireale.*

## 91. THE OLD MISER

**T**here was once an old miser who married three times, and he always sought to bring about his wife's death. Each time he married, he made a pact with his wife that she was not to eat very much.

"If we're going to remain together," he said, "you have to do what I say."

In the morning he put three lentils into a pot and had his wife boil the

lentils that she was to serve for their lunch. After the lentils were cooked, the husband would fill the plates with broth and divide the three lentils. For the evening meal he bought a penny's worth of sardines and insisted that his wife cook only the ends. She did as he said, and they ate only the halves of the fish. As a result, his first wife slowly withered away from hunger and died.

Then he married again, and the second wife ended up the same way. However, he didn't succeed with the third! The miser had a chicken yard filled with hens, and before leaving the house he always ordered the three lentils or the sardines to be prepared. But the wife, who was cunning, went into the chicken yard, killed a hen, and made broth out of it which she drank. When her husband returned from the fields, she had him eat the sardines or the three lentils that she had cooked for him and pretended to eat them with him. They ate the head of the sardine and finished it. But one morning the wife saw that there were no more hens and only the rooster remained. So she decided to make it lame. When the husband returned, she said, "The rooster's become lame. So, you know what I say? Let's eat it!"

"All right," he replied, "but this rooster must last us for two months."

"How can we do that?"

"First we'll cook the claws, then the beak, and so on. We'll certainly have enough to eat for two months!"

When her husband went into the countryside, his wife began to cook the entire rooster and hid it. When he returned, he said to her, "Did you cook the rooster?"

"Yes, my husband."

"But what did you cook, the claws and the beak?"

"I did everything just as you told me to do."

Then the wife went to heat it up in a pan with the broth, took it off the fire, and put it onto a plate. As he was watching from the door where his wife was coming from, he noticed that she was carrying the plate with the entire rooster on it. When he saw the entire rooster, he was so shocked that he abandoned all hope and began sobbing.

"Oh no, the whole thing, Caterina! . . . Ehhh! The whole thing . . ."

His wife saw that he was dying with these words on his lips. So she called four witnesses and said, "My name is Caterina, my husband is dying and saying, 'The whole thing to Caterina,' so everything here will be mine."

She summoned the notary while her husband made signs with his hand. But his wife continued to say, "Look at him. Everything's to be mine!"

Her husband died, and his wife took all his stuff and remarried.

This tale's been written, this tale's been told  
Now you tell yours because mine's now old.

Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.

## 92. THE PRINCE OF MESSINA

Once upon a time there was a miserly prince in Messina, and he was so miserly that he would skin a louse for a penny.<sup>134</sup> This prince was enormously rich, and he had his table set twice a day with a piece of bread pressed as thin as a wafer and a bottle of water. Although he was so very rich, he had only one servant, whom he paid two pennies a day, an egg, and as much bread as he could eat with the egg. But servants don't put up with treatment like this, and after a week of such a life, they ask to be dismissed, and they leave. Now it so happened that a servant came to work for him, a very cunning man, and even though the prince was sly, this servant was so smart that he could manage to take off his shoes and socks while running. One day, after he saw how bad things were, this servant went to the coal mine near the palace, and he spoke with the owner who had a good deal of money and a beautiful daughter.

"My friend," he said, "do you want to marry off your daughter?"

"God willing, especially if a handsome young man comes by, signor Giuseppe."

"What about the prince?" the servant asked.

"The prince? Don't you know that he's a miser? He wouldn't spend a cent on his wife and wouldn't give three stitches for her . . . and you know what I mean!"

"Nothing to worry about, friend. I'll take care of my part. All you have to do is say that your daughter can *live on nothing*."<sup>135</sup>

After saying this, Giuseppe went to the prince and said, "Master, your Excellency, why don't you get married? You're certainly the right age, and time is flying . . ."

"Ahh!" the prince said. "You want me dead! Don't you know that to support a wife, you have to spend money like water. Hats, silk clothes, shawls, carriages, the theater—nothing doing, Giuseppe! Nothing doing!"

134 Sicilian proverb: *L'avaru scoria un pidocchiu p'un dinaru*. Literally: the miser would skin a louse for some money.

135 Sicilian: *campa di ventu*. Literally: lives off the wind or air.

"But doesn't your lordship know," the servant responded, "that the coalman has a beautiful daughter who lives on nothing? And she also has money and doesn't like luxury, parties, or the theater."

"Are you telling the truth? What do you mean she lives on nothing?"

"Three times a day she takes a fan and fans herself, and she's satiated. If you see her in person, I tell you, your lordship, you'll fall in love with her."

"Well then, have her come here."

Giuseppe went to the coalman and told him everything. In one week the wedding was held, and the coalman's daughter became a princess. And how did the princess manage to eat? Well, every day her mother prepared chickens and cutlets, and the princess and the servant cheerfully slipped out to eat these meals. Meanwhile, the prince was very content that his wife didn't ask for anything to eat, didn't want any amusements, and had no desire to go to the theater. After a month had passed, the coalman's wife began to get tired of spending money and said to the servant: "Well now, friend, when are we going to finish with spending my money. It's time to spend some of that stingy prince's money."

So, Giuseppe went to the princess and said, "You know what you must do? (He spoke to her in a familiar way, addressing her as "tu," but when other people were present, he always said princess and your highness.) You must tell the prince that, now that you've passed the test, it would be nothing for him to let you see his treasures, just a little so that you can fill your eyes. And if he says to you that he's afraid that you might hide some coins in your shoes, you're to answer that you'd be glad to go barefoot with only a dress on your back. If he says yes to you, you're to sprinkle your dress with something that will cause the coins to stick to it, and you're to try to get as many coins as possible to stick to the dress."

The princess went to the prince, but the prince made a sour face and didn't want to let her see his treasures. Finally, she said, "Well then, if you have doubts that I might hide some of the coins in my shoes, I'll gladly walk barefoot among your treasures and will only wear a dress."

"If that's the way you'll do it, then we can go down to my treasure room right now."

The princess prepared everything and took off her shoes. The prince lifted a table, opened a trapdoor, and had her descend after him. When the maiden saw the grand treasures, she was astonished. There were heaps of gold doubloons all around, and even the richest king in the world did not possess half these treasures. In the wink of the eye she flicked some coins with her feet so that they stuck to the hem of her dress. Then she drew near to the prince and

said, "Prince, I'm cold! Throw your coat over my shoulders. I want to go and lie down in my bed."

The prince put his coat over her shoulders and led her to her bed. When he left, she detached the gold doubloons and collected them in a nice little pile. Then Giuseppe brought them to her mother. And this is how they continued to obtain and squander the prince's treasure, while the prince was content that his wife lived off nothing.

Now this prince had a nephew, and the nephew lived right across from the palace. One day the prince and the princess were on their balcony and saw the nephew at his window.

"Peppino," the prince said, "do you know this lady? She is the princess."

"I didn't know, uncle. When did you get married?"

"You don't know anything, but now you know. Why don't you come to my palace next week?"

After the invitation, the prince regretted that he asked his nephew to come. But there was nothing to do. He had to prepare a dinner. So, he pondered the situation for some time and said, "Do you know what I've thought, princess. Meat is expensive. So I'll go on a hunting expedition. I've got five days before the dinner, and then I'll bring some game home. That way we can save money."

"Yes, prince, do it right away," the princess replied.

As soon as the prince departed for the hunt, the princess sent Giuseppe to fetch a locksmith, who arrived shortly thereafter.

"Make a key for this trapdoor right away. I've lost the key and can't open the door."

The locksmith made the key in about the same time it's taking me to tell you this tale. Afterward, the princess descended to the treasure room and took a few sacks of gold doubloons. She went back up the stairs, closed the trapdoor, and put everything back in its place. With the money she had everything in the palace upholstered—furniture, lamps, doors, mirrors, and rugs. Everything in the prince's palace was upholstered including the doorkeeper with his livery hanging down to his feet and his staff with the little ball at the point.

When the prince returned, he cried out, "What's going on? This isn't my house!"

He rubbed his eyes, and he couldn't believe what he saw and kept turning around.

"Servant, where is my palace?"

And he turned around and around.

"Your excellency," the doorman said, "your lordship, what are you looking for? Why don't you enter and go upstairs?"

"Ahhh!" the prince cried out and broke down. "Jesus! My wife has taken everything—all my money!"

When he entered, he saw the large staircase made of marble and all the upholstered rooms.

"Ahhh! Everything . . . my wife!"

He saw the mirrors, the divans, the chairs, the easy chairs, the sofas, and spectacular things.

"Ahhh! Everything . . . my wife!"

He was tormented and falling apart. This was his condition when his wife came and threw herself on a beautiful bed.

"What's the matter, prince?" she asked her husband.

"Ahhh! Everything . . . my wife!"

As he kept saying this, it was clear that he was dying from the shock. His wife pretended to be upset and sent for a notary and four witnesses. As soon as the notary arrived, he said, "Prince, what's the matter? Do you want to make your last will and testament? Speak to me!"

"Everything . . . my wife!"

"Do you want to leave everything to your wife? I understand. Is that the way you want it?"

"Everything . . . my wife . . .!"

And as the notary was writing, the prince was gasping for breath and died.

The princess remained the absolute mistress of everything, and after a short time she married Giuseppe. And this is what happens when the money accumulated by a miser is squandered by others.

*Told by Agutuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 93. THE GLUTTONOUS WIFE

**I**t's been told that once upon a time there was a husband and wife. The husband did the shopping in the morning and brought home meat and pasta.

"Cook these things," he said to this wife, "they'll refresh us."

After he left, his wife went into the kitchen to prepare everything for cooking. When the meal was half cooked, she began to taste the food, unknown to her husband. Well, she tasted and tasted until she finished eating everything. Then she became frightened when she thought about her husband returning.

Quickly she decided to tell him that the cat had eaten everything. At noon, her husband returned, and he was hungry and in a rush to eat.

"Come to the table with the food, Nina," he called her by her name. "Let's eat! I've got the appetite of a horse."

The wife was at a loss what to do.

"How can I bring the food? The cat ate up everything!" she responded.

Now, the poor husband experienced the same thing day after day, always the same. He became desperate, and dying of starvation, he went to the town square. By chance, while he was walking, he met a friend who said to him, "Friend, what's the matter?"

"What should the matter be?! I'm troubled and worried. It's been three days since I last ate. I go shopping, bring back the food, and my wife lets the cat eat up everything."

His friend turned to him and said, "Don't worry. I'll give you a good remedy for this. Take this walnut, almond, chestnut, and hazelnut. Put them in the four corners of the room, and with this you'll see that you'll be able to eat by yourself, and she won't."

Since it was still morning, the husband got up and left to do the shopping. When he returned home, he said to his wife, "Here's the food. Make sure now that you don't let the cat get it."

As usual, his wife went into the kitchen at noon to cook the meat. When it was half cooked, she began feeling it with her hand. When she put her hand into her mouth, she heard a voice coming from four corners of the kitchen:

"Hey there, you, keep your hands off the meat!  
Without your husband, don't you dare to eat!"<sup>136</sup>

When she heard this voice, she began to tremble so much that she couldn't stop farting. Irritated by this and that, she said to herself, "When my husband comes, I'll tell him that we can't remain here any more because there are ghosts."

When her husband came, they sat down to eat. But she didn't want to eat. All she did was pout because she wanted to move and rent another house.

"Enough!" he said. "I just want to eat right now. I'm starving to death."

<sup>136</sup> In the text:

Ola! Che si farà

Senza lui non si mangerà!

Pitrè remarks that these words are "in the more elevated language," i.e., standard Italian. They are often used in the refrains of tales in every dialect. Other examples can be found in the works of Vittorio Imbriani, for instance, *La novellaja milanese*.

When she began to respond and grumble, her husband took a stick and gave her a good beating.

“We can’t live here!” his wife continued to say.


Well, they changed houses, but her husband always put the walnut, the almond, the chestnut, and the hazelnut in the four corners of the room so that she was obliged to get rid of her vice.

My tale’s been written, my tale’s been told,

Now you tell yours, because mine is old.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi.*

## 94. THE SEVEN LITTLE HEADS

nce upon a time there was a good old lady, who had a granddaughter, and this granddaughter did all sorts of things around the house. The grandmother was the one who went out to earn a living for the two of them. One day she brought back seven heads of lamb to the house and gave them to her granddaughter.

“Tanasia,”<sup>137</sup> she said, “I’m going out, and while I’m away, I want you to cook these seven heads. When I return, we’ll eat them.”

The maiden took the heads and began to cook them. There was a cat nearby, and when it smelled the odor, it said:

“Meow, meow!

Half for you, half for me!”

The maiden took one of the heads, gave half to the cat, while she ate the other half. Then the cat turned to her again and spoke:

“Meow, meow!

Half for you, half for me!”

The maiden took another head, divided it, and gave half to the cat and kept the other half for herself. But the cat did not calm down and began to cry once more.

“Meow, meow!

Half for you, half for me!”

137 Short for Atanasia. According to Pitrè, the patron saint of Ficcarazzi, where this tale was told to him, was Saint Atanasio. This is why so many men and women have this name in this region.

In short, one by one, all seven heads wound up in the bellies of Tanasia and the cat. When the heads were finished, the maiden became very confused and began to scratch her head.

“What am I going to do when grandma comes?”

And not knowing what to do, she opened the door and scampered away, head over heels. She ran and ran until she reached a field. When she looked on the ground, she saw some snails. So she took a few and made a beautiful necklace and two pretty bracelets out of them and put them on. That evening, when it became dark, she was still in the middle of the field. Since she was tired and starving, she threw herself down beneath a tree and fell asleep. What happened next? Well, three fairies passed by, and when they saw her, the oldest said, “This poor maiden distresses me. So I’m going to make her the most beautiful maiden there ever was!”

“And I,” said the middle fairy, “I shall make those things that she has around her neck and on her wrists turn into diamonds, pearls, and precious stones.”

“And I,” said the youngest fairy, “I shall arrange it so that she marries a king!”

Upon saying this, the fairies disappeared, and soon Tanasia woke up, and when she saw the bracelets and necklace with such precious gems, she said, “Who did such a good deed for me? May the Lord be blessed!”

Now, let’s leave her and turn to the grandmother. When she returned and saw the door to the house open, the bones of the heads all around, and her granddaughter missing, she felt great anguish, “Jesus! She ate everything!”

She was so stunned that she turned pale. As she left the house, she kept thinking about what happened, and then she said, “She ate everything!”

The poor woman could not find any peace of mind.

Now one day the king went hunting, and where do you think he found himself? In the same field that Tanasia had found the snails, and she was now beautiful, as beautiful as the sun and the moon. When he encountered this beautiful maiden, the prince said, “Oh! What a grand catch! What are you doing here?”

The maiden told him everything that had happened, and the prince very quickly warmed to her and took her back to his palace. Within a week they signed the contracts and were married. The two of them were content and enjoyed life to the hilt.

Now it so happened that, after wandering about for some time, the grandmother entered the city where Tanasia was living. She passed by the royal palace where the prince and Tanasia were staying. As soon as Tanasia saw her, she recognized her.

“That woman is my grandmother,” she said and turned to her servant. “Quick, go after that old woman and tell her to come to the palace. Tell her that there’s food and lodging for her here.”

The servant went and said, “Good woman, the queen says that there is food and lodging for you at the palace. Come with me!”

The old woman kept walking as if she had not heard him.

“She ate everything!” she said in anguish.

The servant returned to the queen and reported, “Your majesty, the old woman didn’t hear me. I delivered your message, and I heard her say, ‘she ate everything,’ and she uttered such a dreadful sigh that I became frightened.”

The queen called another servant and sent him on the same mission. When the servant approached the old woman, she gulped and said, “She ate everything.”

When the queen heard about this, she said to herself, “Jesus, she’s still thinking about the heads. And if my grandmother comes here and embarrasses me, where can I go and hide myself? That starving old woman! Why should she be crying about seven miserable heads of lambs after a year?!”


She turned to the servant and said, “I order you immediately to take that old witch and throw her out the window.”

The servants went to the old woman, tied her up, and—*swisssh!*—they threw her out the window. Meanwhile, Tanasia amused herself with the king.

They remained happy and content,  
While we still can’t pay the rent.

*Told by Giuseppe Foria in Ficaazzi.*

## 95. THE SYMPHONIC EAGLE

nce upon a time there was a merchant who had three sons. One day the oldest said, “I feel ready to go out into the world and put my clever mind to use. Let me have my share of the inheritance, so I can go into business as a merchant.”

His father was pained to hear this and said, “What? Are you leaving me?”

“Yes, father,” answered the son, “I want to go and do exactly as I please and not have to listen to anybody.”

The father realized that he couldn’t change his son’s mind, so he called the captain from one of his ships, entrusted his son to him, and said, “Take care

of him now, because he's my first-born child." Then he gave the son his share of the inheritance, and the youth departed with God's grace.

As soon as he arrived in Naples, the customs officers came up to him and said,

"You have some duty to pay."

"And where must I go to pay it?"

"To the royal palace."

So the young man took his goods to the royal palace. At the entrance he saw a proclamation posted over the portal: *Whoever can locate my daughter within a year, a month, and a day may take her as his wife. But if he fails, his head will be cut off.*

When the young man entered the palace, he greeted the king.

"Have you paid your duty?" asked the king.

"Yes, I have, your Majesty. But let me ask about the proclamation I saw over the portal. It read, whoever can locate your daughter within a year, a month, and a day may take her as his wife. Well, I'd like to try to find her."

"All right," said the king, "but be sure you've read that proclamation carefully before you undertake this task."

"I have read it carefully, your Majesty, and I'm still ready to risk it."

Since the king saw how determined the young man was, he said, "Enjoy the task!" and handed him the set of palace keys.

The youth spent the whole of the year, month, and day searching the palace, but with no results. At the appointed time he went before the king and reported, "Your Majesty, my luck has failed me. If you would consider graciously sparing my life, I'd be very pleased. If not, you may dispose of me as you wish."

The king had no interest in sparing his life, so he drew his sword and cut off the youth's head. In his chamber he had a bell made of wood, and every time he cut off someone's head he would attach it to this bell. And so that's what he did with the head of this poor young man.

Now a year passed, and the middle son of the merchant also wanted to try his hand at business, so he made the same request of his father. The father, however, was reluctant because he had never received news of his first son. But the youth was persistent, and finally the merchant had to agree. He gave him his share of the inheritance, called another of his captains, entrusted the youth to his care, and sent them off. This young man sailed to the same place his brother had gone to. The sailors who had gone with his brother were still with their ship, and as he approached, they recognized his banner as that of their master. So they sent a rowboat to meet him and informed him that his

brother had gone to the king and never been seen since. In the meantime, they had remained with the ship.

The young man went ashore and was approached by the customs officers, who ordered him to go to the palace to pay the duty he owed. He did so and saw the same proclamation his brother had seen. So he went to the king and said, "Your Majesty, I want to search for your daughter, and I know exactly what the proclamation says."

"Enjoy yourself, my boy," said the king, handing him the keys.

Well, a year, a month, and a day passed without his finding the princess. He had to go before the king, who drew his sword and savagely cut off his head. Then the monarch went and placed it alongside the brother's head on the wooden bell.

Now it was the youngest brother's turn to go to the father and say, "Father, I too wish to have my share of the inheritance and to try my luck at being a merchant."

The father began weeping and imploring him not to go, but the young man was adamant. So his father gave him his share and entrusted him to another of his captains, and it was a sad departure.

They sailed onto the high seas, and a terrible storm came up. It carried them away to an unknown land, where their ship was forced between two rock cliffs. The captain lowered his anchor and secured the ship, and they waited some time until the storm abated. Then the young man came back on deck, looked around, and saw a reef nearby. He called the captain, saying, "Captain, come look! I think we've found a special preserve. Let's go see what we can find."

So they got into a small boat and went and found a grotto, in which there were two giants. "Let's test these giants' courage," said the captain, and he fired a shot into the air. At the sound of the shot, the two giants flung themselves headfirst on to the ground. "Captain," said the sailors, "these two are nothing but fools,<sup>138</sup> so we'll be safe here."

Then the merchant's son said to the giants,

"What are you doing there?"

"We're digging for gold," they answered.

"And may we have some of this gold?"

"Of course, take as much as you want."

So they loaded up their ship with as much gold as they could, and since the

138 The word we translated as "fools" is *mancia-maccarrun* (macaroni-eaters), a term of abuse, according to Pitre, commonly used for Neapolitans until about 1860. It was especially applied to Bourbon soldiers. The form *maccarrun* is not Sicilian but meant to parody Neapolitan pronunciation.

sea was now calm, they set sail. With luck, they found the same course that the other two brothers had taken, and eventually they came to the port where the first two boats were docked. The sailors from these boats came out to meet them and told them that the first two brothers had gone to pay their customs duty and never come back. At this point the customs agents appeared and asked the young man to pay the duty he owed, and so he went to the palace. There he read the proclamation and paid the duty. When he saw the king, he had the same discussion as his brothers and proposed that he search for the princess. The king tried to discourage him, but he was obstinate and eager to begin the search.

Well, he spent the whole day looking for the king's daughter, but with no success. After a year and fifteen days had gone by, he was unsure what to do next, so he went to the king and said,

"Your Majesty, I request a favor of you. I feel a bit stifled in here and want to go out into town and get some fresh air."

"All right, my boy, but I remind you that you have only sixteen days left in which to finish your search."

The young man went out and began strolling through the town. He came across an old woman who kept asking him why he was so glum so that he finally had to tell her his whole story. When she heard his situation, she said,

"Here's what you must do. Go to a goldsmith and have him make you a gold and silver eagle, as big as you are so that you can fit inside it. Make sure that the eagle plays melodies and symphonies and has two keys on its head that you can push to make it play all these wonderful sounds. Then have someone walk around in front of the royal palace with this eagle, and the king will invite him inside to look at it. At that point the queen will want to show it to the princess."

So the youth went with all his gold and gave instructions to build the eagle, and the next day it was ready, a truly wondrous device. The youth hurried to his ship and selected the best young sailors to join him, and he told them his plan. After he got inside of the eagle, four of these men mounted the eagle on their shoulders and carried it to the palace, while the crowd lined up in rows to look at this marvel the likes of which they'd never seen before. As soon as the king saw it, he wanted it brought into the palace. The sailors feigned reluctance, then let themselves be persuaded, and the king gave them a nice reward for carrying it upstairs. When they had gone, the king and queen and all the members of the court began playing with the eagle and delighting in its music.

Now, the queen loved her daughter too much to allow her to miss such a treat, so she begged the king to let the princess see it. The king agreed, and

this is what he did. He got a large basket and a hammer, a trowel, and a chisel in it, and then they went down into the basement where they had hidden the princess. Of course, the youth was hiding inside the eagle so he could see exactly where they were going. The king went down seven staircases, through seven rooms, and then out into a garden. Here he took a measuring-rod and measured out fifty feet. After he came to a large urn, he and the queen descended still another staircase, and finally they came to the princess. She was accompanied by twenty-four maidens who resembled her so closely that no one could tell them apart. The king and queen had the eagle play a marvelous symphony. Afterward, they left it with the princess to enjoy for the night and went back upstairs. In the meantime the princess enjoyed the music all night long.

At the first light of dawn, the princess placed the eagle alongside her bed, got into bed, and went to sleep. The young man came out of his hiding place, undressed, and got into bed with the princess. She woke up with a shout, but he put his hand over her mouth and said, "Keep still! I have run many risks to get to you, and if you betray me, I am ruined!"

The princess understood the situation, and took advantage of it, and they had fun all morning long. When it was time to take leave of one another, the princess said,

"Listen, when my father sees that you've found where I am, he'll impose another task on you. He'll say, 'Now, when you go downstairs, you'll have to tell my daughter apart from the twenty-four other maidens. The first one that you throw your arms around is the one you will have to marry.' You will notice that all twenty-five of us have ribbons in our hair, but the others' are one color, and mine is a different color. You can't afford to make a mistake, or you'll lose me!"

Having said this, the princess called for her morning coffee and a full breakfast, because she was tired from all the night's activities. She shared her breakfast with the young man, and then he shut himself back inside the eagle, and she made it play all kinds of wonderful music, a pleasure to hear. Later in the morning the king came down to see his daughter and bring the eagle back up. Then he had the four sailors come, and they carried it away, careful not to jostle their master inside. As soon as they were away from the palace, they took it to their shop and let him out. Then they broke the eagle into little pieces, gathered them up, and threw them into the sea. As soon as this was done, the young man sent his sailors back on board the ship and presented himself at the palace, where he appeared before the king with a melancholy face.

"Well, my fine young fellow, your time is almost up. Do you realize that?"

"All right, your Majesty, let me have one more chance to search. I know that I am standing at the brink of doom, but before I die, I'd like to go around and touch all the walls and corners of the palace."

"Of course, my boy, do whatever you like."

So the young man went around the entire palace touching and probing until he came to the secret place. He could feel where the wall gave back a hollow sound, and he prepared to open it up. The king looked very upset, but the youth said to him, "You may cry over your wall, your Majesty, but remember that my life is at risk."

When he opened up the wall, he saw a door, discovered a staircase, and began going down. In vain the king called after him, "Watch out! There's a lion down there!" but the youth didn't stop. When he came to the garden, he took out the measuring-rod and pretended to play with it while he measured out the fifty feet. At the fiftieth, he found the urn and gave it a push. "Don't damage my urn!" shouted the king, but the youth pushed ahead. Finally the king said,

"All right, you've located my daughter. But I have another challenge for you. My daughter is one of twenty-five maidens who look alike. If you cannot recognize her at first glance, you lose your life."

At this moment, twenty-five maidens appeared, all dressed identically. But the young man saw which one had a different colored ribbon. So he ran up and threw his arms around her. Now they all went back up into the palace. The young man sent for his father, and in his presence he and the princess were wed.

So they remained happy and content,  
While we sit here without a cent.

*Told in Geraci-Siculo by a mule-driver named Giuseppe Antista in the presence of Luciano Consolo of Catania and his son Antonio Consolo of Alimena.*

## 96. THE GOLDEN EAGLE

Here's a tale that's been told time and again.

Once upon a time there was a young man of great wealth, who lived all alone. Since he had no desire to marry, he used his wealth to build a vast palace, six miles long, and he used to go riding around in it in a grand carriage, all by himself. Then he posted the following proclamation.

*If you have lots of money, you can do as you please;  
If you have a fine horse, you can ride where you please.*

Well, it happened one day that the king rode by and saw the proclamation. He summoned the handsome young man and said to him, "So you really consider yourself more powerful than I am? Then listen to this: within one year, one month, and one day you must either find where my daughter is hiding, or I'll have your head chopped off." And he rode off very angry and indignant.

This left the poor young fellow upset, and he began sulking. He had no choice but to saddle his horse and ride in search of what fortune might bring. Eventually, he came to a town and met some local gentlemen, who asked him,

"Why does such a fine young fellow like you look so worried?"

"Why shouldn't I look worried? The fact is that I have great wealth, I live by myself, and I had a grand palace built for myself, with a proclamation"—which he quoted—"and then the king came by and took offense, and in his jealousy he's threatened to chop off my head unless I can tell him where his daughter is hiding and show him some proof."

"Oh, my dear young man, there's no need to be so troubled over this. Do you have lots of money?"

"Yes, I have all you could ask for!"

"Well, then, your problem is solved, and here's what we'll do. We'll make an eagle all of gold, with beak and feet of silver, and two diamonds for its eyes—in short, a work made entirely of precious materials. This will take four months, my good fellow, but as long as you have the time and the money, this is an easy problem to solve."

Well, four months went by, and the eagle was ready. They put the young man inside it, mounted it upon a wagon, and brought it through town after town until they came to the king and knocked at his palace doors. Now, you should know that the man whose idea it was to hide the youth inside the eagle happened to be a close relative of the king. So he greeted him and said,

"Your Majesty, do you see how wonderful this eagle is, made all of silver and gold? If only my niece could see it,"—referring to the king's daughter—"imagine what a great delight it would give her."

"But why have you chosen this moment for her to see it?" answered the king. "I am keeping her hidden in the underground rooms of the palace for certain reasons of my own."

"Oh, my dear brother," answered the man, "why not let her see it now? I've brought it all this way because I knew it would really be a joy and a treat for her. Everyone who sees it says the same thing: 'How precious! What a

wonder! What an elegant creation!’ So why don’t you let the princess have the pleasure of seeing it too?”

“Oh, all right,” said the king. “The princess can see it.”

And so they brought it inside and carried it down to the underground rooms for the princess to see. “Oh, uncle,” exclaimed the princess when she saw it, “what a beautiful object! I’ve never seen anything so precious, not even in our royal court!”

That evening they had dinner in a festive mood, and then they went to bed. All the while the young man was cooped up inside the eagle, not able to say “boo!” The uncle, who had the king’s full confidence, remained in the princess’ bedroom, with the golden eagle at his side. When it was midnight, he pressed a spring he had devised, and after the eagle slowly opened, out came the young man.

“Oh, uncle, I’m afraid!” said the princess.

“Quiet, my niece, it’s nothing to be frightened of. Let me explain it all to you, and you’ll see that it’s to your advantage and also to this young man’s. This handsome young fellow is as wealthy as they come, and unmarried as well. He built a huge palace, six miles long, with a proclamation (and he quoted it). This aroused your father’s jealousy, and he threatened to have the young man’s head chopped off if he could not discover your hiding place and show some proof, within a year, a month, and a day. I urge you to save this young man, and it will be your good fortune as well.”

Now, since the princess had already fallen in love with the youth the minute she saw him, she was happy to comply. She took the diamond ring off her finger and handed it to him. “Here, this is the proof of my love.”

The next morning the uncle arose, said goodbye to the princess and the king, and went back to his own town, taking the golden eagle with him. In a few more days, the period of a year, month, and day was completed, and the king sent for the young man.

“Well,” he said, “do you have an answer for me, or do I chop off your head?”

“Your Majesty, here is your answer,” and he showed him the princess’s ring.

The king was completely astonished and had to admit defeat.

“My daughter is yours,” he announced. “I choose you as her husband because you are the right person. I now realize that you spoke the truth with your proclamation:

*If you have lots of money, you can do as you please;  
If you have a fine horse, you can ride where you please.”*

The wedding was carried out with great happiness and celebration. The two young people were happy and content for the remainder of their lives, while the rest of us sit here in discomfort, talking and listening and cleaning our teeth.

*Told by Ninfa Lobaido to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 97. THE ABBOT WITHOUT WORRIES

**I**t's been told, gentlemen, that there was once a priest in a city, and when he was made an abbot, he indulged himself with carriages, horses, footmen, cooks, valets, secretaries and many other people. This abbot thought about nothing other than eating, drinking, and sleeping. All the priests envied him, and secular people as well. They called him "the abbot without worries."

One day the king happened to be passing through this city, and he stopped there. Immediately, all the abbot's enemies went to the king and accused the abbot of something.

"Your Majesty," they said, "in this city there is one person who is happier than you are. He is a rich man who has everything he wants on this earth, and his name is 'the abbot without worries.' "

Now, when the king heard about this abbot, he thought for a moment and then said to all those who had brought charges against the abbot, "Go away, and be content because I shall shortly have this abbot full of worries."

Right after this, the king summoned the abbot, who ordered his carriage drawn by four horses to be assembled, and then went to the king. Now the king greeted him with hospitality, had him sit down by his side, and talked with him about many things. Finally, the king asked him why he was called "the abbot without worries," and the abbot responded because he felt free and without worries, and whoever had concerns, his employees looked after them.

"Well, then, Signor Abbot," the king said, "since you have nothing to do, I'd like you to do me a favor and count all the stars in the sky within three days and three nights. If you don't do this, you'll be condemned to death."

When the poor abbot without worries heard this, he began to shake like a leaf, and after taking leave from the king, he returned to his house, confused and frightened to death by the terror that faced him.

Soon after he arrived at his house, it was already the time to dine. Because he was so dazed, however, he couldn't eat and went straight to the terrace to

look at the sky. But the poor man couldn't even manage to gaze at the stars. When it became dark and the stars appeared, he began to count, and the poor abbot noted them down. But at a certain point, dawn broke, and darkness ended without his having counted everything. The cook, the valet, the footman, coachman, and all the servants in the house became concerned when they saw that their master was not eating and drinking and just kept looking into the sky. They didn't know what to believe and thought that he had perhaps gone insane. To be brief, the abbot spent the next three days in this manner without being able to count all the stars. Nor did he have any idea of how he would present himself before the king who would certainly have him decapitated.

Finally, on the last day, a loyal servant kept asking the abbot what was wrong until his master told him everything and said, "I haven't been able to count the stars, and the king will have my head chopped off this morning."

After the servant had heard everything, he said, "Don't worry. Just leave it to me, and I'll take care of everything."

The servant left and bought a huge oxen skin, stretched it out on the ground, cut off a piece of the tail, half an ear, and a little part of the skin on the flank. After doing this, he said to the abbot, "Now go to the king, and when he asks your Excellency how many stars there are, your Excellency should call for me. I shall stretch out the skin on the ground and then your lordship is to tell the king: 'There are just as many hairs on this skin as there are stars in the sky. But since there are more hairs, I've cut off the excess amount.'"

When the abbot heard all that his servant had to say, he became cheerful, ordered his carriage to be prepared, and took the servant with him to the king. As soon as the king saw the abbot, he greeted him and asked, "Have you obeyed my command?"

"Yes, your majesty, I've counted all the stars."

"Then tell me, how many are there?"

Now the abbot called the servant who was carrying the oxen skin and stretched it out on the ground. The king, who didn't understand the point of it all, just watched. When the servant finished stretching out the skin, the abbot said to the king, "Your majesty, during the past three days, I almost went crazy counting the stars, and I've counted them all."

"Well then, how many are there?" the king asked him.

"Your majesty, there are just as many hairs on this skin as there are stars in the sky. Since there are more hairs, I've cut the excess number off on this piece of this skin. There are hundreds of millions, and if you don't believe

me, have them counted because I've done this very seriously and have brought you the proof."

Now the king's jaw dropped when he heard this, and he didn't know how to reply. The only thing he could say was: "Go and live like Noah without worries, for you have a great deal of spirit."

And after saying this, he dismissed the abbot, thanked him, and they remained the best of friends.

The abbot returned home with his servant, very content and in a festive mood. When they arrived at the house, the abbot thanked the servant, appointed him the master of the house and his personal confidante. Moreover he gave him as much money as he needed for his entire life.

*Collected by Salvatore Pasquale Vigo in Acireale.*

## 98. THE PREGNANT LIEUTENANT

Once upon a time there was a merchant who had a daughter. Now, it happened that every day a poor woman would come to him begging for alms, and she had a little boy with her. The merchant took quite a liking to this boy, and one day he said to the mother, "My good woman, would you be willing to let me have your son as my own, if I pay you a handsome sum for him?"

Well, the woman went to ask her husband, and he was willing, especially since the merchant had agreed to allow them to see the boy once a month. And so they gave their son to the merchant.

As the youth was growing up in the merchant's shop, he came to believe that the merchant's daughter was his sister, and he loved her more than the pupil of his own eye. Well, time passed and this youth, whose name was Pippinu, had grown up. One day, the merchant received a summons from the king, and he had to leave.

"Pippinu," he said, "I must go to the king, and so I'm going to leave you in charge of everything here. Take very good care of your sister."

The merchant left to see the king, and Pippinu remained at home with his sister. Each day they would exchange many caresses, since they were extraordinarily fond of one another. Well, it happened that a princess lived directly opposite them, and she would spy on them. One Sunday she saw them exchanging hugs and kisses, and she thought ill of it.

"When that merchant returns," she said, "I must inform him of this."

And so soon after his return, she summoned him and told him what she thought. The merchant was embarrassed at being reprimanded by the princess and went home in a rage. He bawled out Pippinu and banished him from his shop. The young girl was terribly upset by this and raised a ruckus, but to no avail.

Now that Pippinu was out in the world, he decided to enlist as a soldier. When the merchant's daughter learned of this, she took a large sum of money, dressed up like a man, left home, and enlisted in the same regiment as Pippinu. She used her money to pay for a commission, made up imaginary feats of valor she could claim (like killing an entire band of robbers), and became a corporal. Four months later she did the same thing and was promoted to sergeant. Once a sergeant, she wanted to become a lieutenant and used another sum of money to advance to that rank. Once a lieutenant, she was entitled to a room in the king's palace, and also to have an orderly to serve her. She made the rounds of the regiment, located Pippinu, and made him her orderly. And by this time there was no way that Pippinu could recognize her.

Now she began instructing her orderly in the customs of the royal residence.

"Do you see these little boots?" she asked. "You'll polish one, and I'll polish the other."

When it was time for dinner, she had her orderly sit right next to her, and it made Pippinu uncomfortable to be shown such preference by his lieutenant. When dinner was over, she gave him twelve coins and said, "This is for you Pippinu, go and enjoy yourself," and Pippinu was deeply moved by such kindness.

That night, Pippinu retired to bed, and the next day the lieutenant treated him just as well. Finally, she said to him, "Pippinu, who are you, and how did you get to be a soldier? Let me hear your story." And so Pippinu told her his whole story. When he had finished, his "lieutenant" asked him,

"And did you truly love that young woman?"

"Of course I truly loved her," he replied, "except that at that time I loved her like a sister, because I didn't yet know that I wasn't her brother."

At this point, all she could do was give him another twelve coins and send him out. But when evening came, she said to him, "Pippinu, instead of making up your bed over there, make it up over here next to mine," and the orderly did as he was told. That night she revealed herself to him, and that was that.

After some time had passed, the lieutenant grew ill, and her belly began to swell. For a joke, people began to say, "The lieutenant is pregnant! We have a pregnant lieutenant!" This joking went on for a while, but after seven months

the illness hadn't gone away, and her belly kept growing. The doctors said, "This must be hydrops, an excess of water." The ninth month arrived, and the lieutenant had labor pains. The doctors said, "What's to be done? Pierce the abdomen to drain off the liquid? He may be dying." And just as the doctors were about to give up, the lieutenant gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. The news was spread everywhere. Inside the palace, they were saying, "Did you hear? The lieutenant had a baby! Yes, he had a baby!" until finally it reached the ears of the king. The king sent for the orderly, and in the king's presence he could no longer conceal the truth.

When the king had heard the whole story, he had the young woman's father come, and in the end, she and Pippinu were married. Soon thereafter they went back home to live together, with their child and a handsome present from the king.

So these two lived on, as husband and wife,  
While we must do donkey's work, all of our life.<sup>139</sup>

*Collected in Palermo from Luigi Patuano.*

## 99. ARDANTI AND FIURINA

**H**ere's a tale told again and again, and it's for you, my good gentlemen. Once upon a time there was a king and his queen. This king had an enormous liking for a certain prince, and the queen loved the prince's wife just as much, so that this prince and princess began spending most of their life at the royal palace. In the evenings they would hold long conversations far into the night, until the late hour required the prince and princess to return to their own palace.

One day, the queen said to the king,

"My lord, it bothers me that the princess has to leave in the middle of the night to return home. Wouldn't it be better simply to give them a room in our own palace? That way they would always be close by."

"Yes," the king replied, "your idea makes perfect sense. Tomorrow I'll speak to the prince about it."

So the next day, when the prince arrived, the king said to him, "My dear prince, listen to what the queen and I have thought of. We'd like to give you

139 Iddi arristaru maritu e muggghieri,  
E nuatri comu li sumeri.

the best room in our palace so that you and I can always be together, and the queen can enjoy the princess's company."

The prince was delighted with this offer and presented it to his wife, who was also very pleased, and she began making preparations to move there. It would be hard to exaggerate the affection these four people felt for one another.

Now, it happened during this time that the queen became pregnant, and so did the princess, and both women began preparing all the little things that go with a first baby. When their time came, the queen gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, and the princess had a beautiful baby boy. The queen called her girl Fiurina, and the princess called her boy Ardanti. The two mothers were continually in each other's company, and so the boy and girl grew up close together. When they reached young adulthood, their love for one another was beyond imagining. They were like the dearest of brothers and sisters.

Well, there's always envy among equals, as the saying goes.<sup>140</sup> Before long, the members of the royal court could not stand seeing the great affection the king had for the prince. One day one of the courtiers, the most envious of the group, went to the king and said, "Your Majesty, I must tell you that we are all very distressed to see the little infanta growing up so attached to the prince's son. One of these days, mark my words, the two of them are sure to fall in love."

Well, the king didn't want to believe him, and let him know that in his palace no one could tell him what to do and not do. And yet, at the same time, he let the idea sink in,<sup>141</sup> saying to himself, "I think the man is right." So, the day came when he told the queen to keep the little infanta more secluded and away from young Ardanti, because now she was quite grown up. Then he called the prince and said to him, "My good prince, I'd like you to keep your son away from my daughter. At their age, they shouldn't be playing together any more."

So the prince went to his wife and told her all this.

Now let's leave them and turn to Fiurina. When she no longer could see Ardanti, she burst into tears and said, "I want to see Ardanti! He's the one I want!" And when they brought her breakfast in the morning, she burst out with, "I don't want any breakfast! I'll eat breakfast only when I can have it together with Ardanti!"

Then she went directly to the princess's room and took Ardanti by the hand so she could have breakfast with him. After that, whenever Ardanti

140 This is a well-known Sicilian proverb (*la 'nvidia è 'nta li pari*), seen elsewhere in this collection.

141 A literal translation of the lively Sicilian idiom reads: "he made himself soup with it" (*cci fici suppa*).

withdrew from her, she would run and find where he was and stay with him.

As soon as the king saw the two of them together, he grew angry and summoned the prince.

"All right," he said to him, "since you're incapable of keeping your son away from my daughter, you will have to leave my palace."

"It's not our fault, your Majesty," answered the prince. "It's the young infanta that keeps coming to find Ardanti."

"In that case," said the king, "we'll have to remove them from one another's sight."

And so the prince and princess had to take their son and leave the palace.

Once Ardanti was separated from Fiurina, he shut himself in his room and refused to come out. His mother kept encouraging him to come out and find some way to amuse himself, but he would have none of that. His friends came and tried to visit him, but he refused to see anyone. Now, let's leave Ardanti there in his sad state and turn back to Fiurina.

Once Fiurina learned that the prince and princess had been banished from the royal palace and that she had lost Ardanti, she shut herself in her room and refused all food. The servants who brought her food reported this to the king, who exclaimed, "Then let her die of hunger!"

In her desperation, Fiurina hatched the following plan. She disguised herself as a man, armed herself with a pistol, had a fine horse saddled, and rode to Ardanti's palace. She had them announce to the princess that a friend of Ardanti's had arrived who had a matter of great urgency to discuss. The princess was pleased and sent her to Ardanti's room. He refused to answer, but Fiurina slipped a note under his door that said, "Open up, it's Fiurina!" and he let her in.

"I've brought food for us," she said. "First let's eat, and then we can run away together."

So, after they ate, Ardanti told his mother that he and his friend were going to take a walk together, and she was happy to give her permission.

Once they were outside, Fiurina said, "Ardanti, now we are free. My father has a palace nearby that we can go to. You have nothing to worry about, because my father would never dare put his only child to death."

They arrived at the palace, but had not been there long before they saw a band of soldiers coming. Fiurina turned to Ardanti and said,

"Ardanti, these are my father's men coming to get me. Although my father will not do me any harm, the same is not true for you. You can go down into the cellar and use the underground passage to escape. Here, take this ring of mine. It is a pledge that I will not marry anyone else if I cannot have you."

So they pledged their love, and Ardanti escaped.

When the soldiers arrived, Fiurina went to meet them, saying, "I know it's me you've come for, and here I am."

"I have orders from your father to bring you to him tied to the tail of my horse," the general responded. "But I can't bear to do that, so you can ride up here at my side," and that's what they did.

The general brought her to the palace and handed her over to the king. When the king saw his daughter, he first gave her a slap and then ordered them to throw her down into the cellar because he didn't want to see her any more. Then he had his men go and seize the prince and princess and lock them in a prison dungeon, saying that they would be released only when they could deliver Ardanti to him. Well, you can imagine what this poor father and mother were feeling, not knowing anything about what was happening to their son. So let's leave them there in their sad state and go back to Ardanti.

Once he had managed to escape through the underground passage, he found his horse and rode until he came to the seashore. There he found a ship ready to sail. So he went to see the captain and asked to be taken on board. The captain, impressed by this handsome youth, readily agreed, and they sailed off.

Once they had docked at the captain's own city, Ardanti went directly to the palace and presented himself to the king as a foreigner who was looking for employment. This king was very taken with Ardanti's fine manners and handsome looks and immediately accepted him as if he were his own son. As time passed, he gave him more authority in his kingdom and soon came to see that the young man handled all matters exceedingly well. And so, finally, the king ended up making Ardanti the absolute ruler of the land. One day, he called the young man to his side and said, "My son, I've grown very old now, and so I am putting all my estates and documents in your hands. You are free to act as you wish, and may the Lord be with you."

And so now Ardanti was in complete charge of ruling the kingdom. One day, looking through some papers, he discovered a huge debt owed by the King of Spain, who was Fiurina's father. So he went to the old king and said that they might need to declare war.

"War? Against who?" asked the king.

"Against the King of Spain," he answered, "because he owes you a vast sum of money."

"My son," answered the king, "didn't I make you the absolute ruler of this land? Act as you wish, since you have good judgment."

So Ardanti wrote immediately to Fiurina's father that he must either pay the debt or there would be war. The king received the letter, read it, and

replied that he could not pay the debt, and that if they wanted to go to war, he was ready. Ardanti read the letter and began preparing for war. He put himself at the head of his troops, and Fiurina's father similarly was at the head of his own army. Soon after the battle began, Ardanti was victorious, and Fiurina's father was taken prisoner. Back at the palace, however, he did not treat him like a prisoner, but allowed him to sit at the table with himself and the old king.

Now, the old king knew all about what had happened to Ardanti previously, and what this king had done to him. So, during one conversation at dinner, he asked him if he had any children.

"Oh, yes," he replied, with a sigh, "I do, but she has been like a thorn piercing my heart."

"Why so?" asked the old king.

"Because, your Majesty, she was in love with the son of a local prince of my kingdom, and refused to marry any of the many royal suitors who came to seek her hand. So her stubbornness has forced her to be content with life in an underground chamber in my palace."

"Well, your Majesty," said the old king, "do you think she might be persuaded to reconsider? It would give me great pleasure to marry her to my son." (The old king, of course, was now calling Ardanti his son.)

"Oh, no, your Majesty! She'll never be persuaded, not now, or ever!"

At this point Ardanti answered, "Your Majesty, why don't you let me have a try? I'll take a boat directly there and see if I can persuade her."

"I'd be much obliged," answered the king. "If you can win her over, she's yours."

So Ardanti boarded a ship and came to the palace where Fiurina was imprisoned. He carried a letter from her father that granted him permission to speak with her. So the guards let him go down into the cellar where she was, and she was compelled to receive him.

"You royal Highness," he began, "I am the son of the king who holds your father prisoner. If you wish to free him, you must accept me as your husband."

The princess burst into tears at her father's misfortune, but replied that she could not accept the offer because she had given her word to a young man she loved, and she would rather die than break her promise. Then Ardanti looked at her and said,

"And if you saw this young man, would you recognize him?"

"I certainly would, but who knows if he is still alive?"

At these words, Ardanti revealed himself, recounted all he had been through, and showed her the ring she gave him when they made their pledge.

At this point she threw herself into his arms, and you cannot imagine the joy they felt!

Ardanti immediately wrote to the king that his daughter had accepted the marriage proposal. Then he left Fiurina to go to his mother and father and set them free from prison. All four of them took ship and sailed back to the other kingdom. At the palace, Ardanti handed Fiurina over to her father, saying that he had, with difficulty, managed to persuade her to marry him.

Now they held a great banquet, and at a certain moment the old king happened to call Ardanti by name, and the other king heard it.

"What? Are you really Ardanti?" he asked?

"Ardanti indeed!" came the reply. "I am Ardanti and no one but Ardanti! And you are the one who put my mother and my father in a prison dungeon, and do you see how much they've aged?"

And here he brought forth the prince and the princess, and the king could see the truth of this. The final words that Fiurina's father was able to utter were, "And, so, you really are Ardanti. . . ." And with these words he fell dead on the spot.

*Collected in Palermo by Pardi.*

## 100. GIUMENTU, THE ISHMAELITE MERCHANT

Once upon a time there was a king, who went hunting one day with all his servants. During the hunt, the sky clouded over, and it began raining buckets. Everyone ran this way and that way, losing one another in the downpour. Eventually the king found his way to a solitary cottage, where an old man gave him shelter, dried his clothes, and offered him a bed.

That night, the merchant was half asleep when he heard the old man talking in a loud voice. He saw him outside, but didn't not see anyone he could be speaking with, so he asked him,

"Who are you conversing with, old man?"

"I am conversing with the planets," came the answer.

"And what are you saying to the planets?"

"I'm thanking them for the favor they've granted me."

"And what favor might that be?" asked the king.

"My wife has just given birth to a baby boy, and your wife to a baby girl, and when these two grow up they will marry. That's what I'm thanking them for."

"Why, you despicable old man," answered the king, "how dare you presume to say such things in my presence?! We'll speak about this again in the morning."

But in the morning the king wanted nothing more than to return to his palace. So he quickly dressed and left. Along the road he met his knights and valets, and he said to them, "Run to the palace right away, and find out whether my wife has given birth."

So, one of the knights went running and in a short time came back. "It's true, your Majesty," he reported, "the queen has given birth to a beautiful baby girl."

The king lost no time and rushed to the palace. When he arrived there, he was greeted with shouts of "Congratulations, your Majesty! Congratulations!" and everyone was celebrating. He rushed to the queen's room, and when he saw the new baby girl, he ordered that all the male children born and baptized that day should be brought to him.<sup>142</sup> The servants went all over town, and in less than an hour they found the one male child born that day. The mother refused at first to surrender her child, but when she heard this was the king's order, she had to grit her teeth and hand over the baby. Once the king had this child, he ordered his men to take it into the forest, murder it, and bring him back the baby's tongue.

Well, when the king commands, you have to obey. The king's servants took the baby into a forest far from town and prepared to kill it. But then one of them said to the other, "Why must we slaughter this poor, innocent child? I see a dog here. Why don't we kill this dog, cut out its tongue, and stain the baby's shirt with its blood? We can leave the baby here alive, and let the rest be up to God."

"A perfect plan," said his companion, and that's what they did.

Now let's leave them, as they were bringing back the bloodied shirt and the tongue that they intended to tell the king belonged to the child, and let's return to the child, who was left alone crying his heart out. It so happened that a certain gentleman was passing through this very forest, an Ishmaelite merchant named Giumentu.<sup>143</sup> He was on his way to hunt, but when he heard the baby's persistent crying, he went to find him. "Oh, you poor little creature!" Giumentu exclaimed, and he picked the child up and brought him home to his wife.

142 As Pitrè notes, this is a clear echo of King Herod's order as reported in the nativity story of the New Testament.

143 "Ishmaelite" would suggest the merchant was an Arab or a Jew, and Giumentu means "pack-horse," but neither of these meanings is significant for the story as we have it.

When his wife saw him returning early from his hunt, she asked, "Is there some problem?"

"No problem," he replied. "On the contrary, my hunt was a great success. Look at this baby boy that I found. After all the years we've been childless, the good Lord has now sent him to us."

And so the couple raised the child and sent him to school, where he was well educated. They regarded him as their son, and he viewed them as his parents. When he was about 20 years old, his father said to him,

"My boy, I'm getting on in years, while you are just coming into your prime. So here is my plan. I'm turning all my papers and accounts over to you, and all my wealth as well, and you can run my business for me."

This, of course, required traveling abroad for the young man, and he soon had all his trunks and suitcases packed, and his own servants to accompany him on the trip.

"Good-bye, papa! Good-bye, mamma! May God keep you well!"

"Good-bye, my son!" they called back.

And the young man was on his way.

Well, he traveled a long distance, wandering through one place after another, until finally he arrived in Spain. Then he sent a messenger ahead to the royal palace, and the king summoned the merchant to come and show him his precious gems. Now, this king was no other than the one who had ordered the little child to be killed, and he called his daughter, who by now had become a beautiful young maiden, and said to her, "Come and see if there's anything here that you like."

Well, when the maiden saw the handsome youth, she fell head over heels in love with him at first sight.

"What's the matter with you, daughter?" asked the king.

"It's nothing, papa."

"Is there something you want? Just tell me."

"Well . . . it's not the precious gems that I want. It's the handsome young man himself."

The king then turned to the young merchant and asked,

"Tell me who you are."

"I am the son of Giumentu, the Ishmaelite merchant, and I am going around the world learning his business because my father is getting old and cannot keep working much longer."

Well, the king pondered the situation for a moment or two and then asked, "Would you be interested in having my daughter as your wife?"

Since the young merchant had also fallen in love with the princess, he

answered, "Yes, since it pleases your Majesty, as long as my mother and father will agree."

"Then hurry home, and come back with the answer as soon as you can."

So the young man left, returned to his home, and recounted the whole story to his parents. After he finished his speech, his mother burst out in anger, "I'll have none of this! How dare you? Since this princess has captured your heart, get out of this house at once! You're no longer welcome here!"

"But mother, what have I done wrong?"

"Don't use the word 'mother' to me! When was I ever your mother?"

"What? Do you mean you're not my real mother?"

"Me? The truth is, I'm not related to you."

And she proceeded to tell him the whole story. The poor youth was so upset at what he heard that he almost burst a blood vessel. When she was through talking, she said, "Here is some money and clothing, and whatever you need. Take it, go, and leave me in peace."

The young man turned to his father for help, but all he could say was, "You heard what my wife said, and her wishes must be obeyed. I can do nothing to help you."

Well, the young man had no choice but to leave, upset and inconsolable. He walked a long way, and when evening came, he found himself in a solitary forest that terrified him. When he reached the foot of a tree, he flung himself on the ground, weeping and sighing. "Oh, mother of mine, what am I to do, all alone here? Oh, spirit of my mother, if only you could comfort me tonight!"

By now, the poor young man was in a state of total despair.<sup>144</sup> And as he lay there lamenting, who should appear but an old man with a long beard.

"What's your problem, my young fellow?"

"What problem *don't* I have?" he replied. "I have the worst possible luck."

And he proceeded to tell how he was the son of an Ishmaelite merchant and was supposed to marry the daughter of the King of Spain, but his parents kicked him out of their house saying that he was not really their son, and that they had found him abandoned in the woods. In reply, the old man said, "No need to be afraid. I am your real father, and I shall help you."

"You? My father?" he answered and gazed at the old man dressed in tatters, "You must be dreaming!"

"Oh, yes, my son," the old man replied, "I truly am your father. If you'll

144 A literal translation of the Sicilian expression is: "he had no longer any blood in his veins" (*sangu 'un n'avia cchiù 'nta li vini*).

come with me, your fortune will be assured, but if you refuse, you'll be lost for good."

The young man looked him in the eye and thought to himself, "Well, if I stay here, I'll certainly be lost. What do I have to lose by going with him? So, let's go!" And he mounted his horse (because he had kept his handsome horse with him), with himself in the saddle and the old man riding behind, and they rode off to Spain.

When they arrived at the royal palace, everyone recognized him, and he was admitted to the king.

"Your Majesty," he said, "this old man says he is my father."

"This wretched old man?" replied the king. "This miserable beggar? How dare you think that I'd give you my daughter's hand in marriage?"

"Your Majesty," interjected the old man, "I am indeed his father. I am the same old man you met once when you were hunting and needed shelter at my house. You recall that I spoke to the stars, and I told you that my wife had given birth that night to a baby boy and your wife to a baby girl, and that these two were destined to be man and wife."

When the king heard these words, he leaped from his seat and screamed, "Be gone from here, you insolent old tramp! How dare you come all the way here to upset me again with these words?!"

At this, the old man took off his tattered clothing, and underneath he was wearing the robe of the Emperor. Well, you should have seen them then! The king threw himself at the Emperor's feet and pleaded, "Forgive me, I beg you, your royal holiness! I didn't realize who you were! Here is my daughter. Do with her as you wish."

And now the Emperor recounted his own story about how he used to visit different places in the world, while his wife separately would do the same thing. Long ago on that evening when he was speaking to the stars, he already knew how all these things would come to pass. When they heard his story, they all embraced and kissed one another, and the wedding date was fixed. But the young man said,

"Now you are all happy, but my heart remains troubled. I still need my mother and father, the ones who raised me and acted as my parents."

"No sooner said than done," said the king. "My servants, my knights, go quickly now to the parents of my son-in-law, find the Ishmaelite merchant Giumentu, and bring him and his wife here."

So off ran his servants, and after they found them, they brought them back within a few days. Now their son proclaimed a great celebration, and putting his arms around them, he said, "Ah, dear father and mother, your tyranny

turned out to be my salvation. Now I can marry the princess, and you will stay here and live with me.”

His parents were speechless with emotion and could only shed tears of tenderness. And so the Emperor’s son and the king’s daughter were wed, and they held a great celebration for the entire city.

And so they lived on, in contentment and peace,  
While we must remain here, cleaning our teeth.

*Told by Agatuzza Messia in Palermo.*

## 101. THE DOVE

**O**nce upon a time there was a king and queen who had an only daughter. And since this maiden had beautiful braids, she did not want any hairdresser to touch her hair.

One day, while she was combing her hair, a dove flew to her window sill, grabbed her comb in its beak, and disappeared.

“Hey! Hey! The dove stole my comb!” the princess shouted, but there was nothing she could do because the dove had vanished. The next day, the dove returned at noon, grabbed the ribbons that the princess used to tie her braids, and flew off.

“Hey, hey! The dove’s stolen my ribbons!”

On the third day the princess had just finished combing her hair and was rubbing her hand and had a cloth draped over her shoulders. All at once the dove arrived, grabbed the cloth, and escaped. This time, the maiden, who was very annoyed, took a silk ladder, climbed down from her window, and ran after the dove. But the bold dove did not flee very far. When it saw the princess approaching, it started flying again and kept hopping away each time the princess drew near. Just imagine how angry the maiden was! Now the dove entered the forest with the princess after it. Finally, the dove slipped into a solitary cottage in the forest, and the princess followed it. When she entered, she saw a handsome young man and said to him, “Did you see a beautiful dove carrying a cloth?”

“Yes,” the young man responded. “I am that very dove.”

“You?”

“Yes.”

“How can that be?”

“The fairies cast a magic spell over me, and I can’t leave here in my human

form until you sit at the window of this cottage for one year, one month, and one day from morning to night. Your eyes must be fixed on the mountain over there, and you'll see me fly as a dove to its peak. If you should see me in my human form in the power of the fairies, however, make sure that you don't cry out. If you do, both of us will be lost."

The princess sat down at the window, and the dove flew off to perch on the peak of the mountain. The first day passed, then the second, and the third. Weeks passed, and it seemed that the maiden was made out of wood. She became black as pitch. After a year, a month, and a day had passed, the dove became a man and flew back to the cottage from the mountain. When he saw how black the princess had become, he cried out, "Phew! How ugly you've become! (He spit in her face.) Aren't you ashamed of doing this just for the sake of a man?" And he sent her away.

The poor maiden felt like dying! Immediately she went into the countryside and burst into tears. While she was weeping, three fairies passed by.

"What's the matter?"

"What should the matter be? Let me tell you what happened to me."

And she told them about her misfortunes.

"Don't lose trust in yourself!" the fairies said. "You won't always remain like this."

The eldest sister touched her face with her hand, and the maiden became beautiful, more beautiful than the sun. The other fairies gave her this and that, and they took her with them. They traveled for quite some time, and do you know where they went? Well, they arrived at the city ruled by the young man, who was a king. When they were there, they had a palace appear within seconds, and it was a hundred times more beautiful than the king's palace. They assumed the role of her servants, and she appeared to be a real empress. When the king went to his window, he was astonished to see such a grand palace across from his and thought he was dreaming. Then he saw the maiden seated at a window, and upon seeing her, he began to drool over her. Meanwhile, the fairies said to the princess, "If the king starts to court you, you're to string him along."

It didn't take much time for the king to make his moves. The first day he stared at her. The second day he winked, and the third day he asked if he could visit her. But the princess, coached by the fairies, responded with a flat *no*.

"Well then, if I can't visit you, perhaps you would be pleased to visit my palace?"

The princess responded once again with a flat *no*. The next day, he asked the same question, and after three days, she said, "Well now, your majesty, if you

want to pay me a visit, you must build a passageway from your balcony to mine, and it must be carpeted with rose petals two feet thick."

No sooner did she utter these words than the king gave orders to build the passageway from his window to that of the empress with a carpet of rose petals two feet thick. All at once hundreds of women began to gather and pick roses, and never had such a sight been seen before.

When the time arrived, the fairies said to the maiden, "Dress yourself as a grand empress, and we shall serve as your ladies in waiting. Begin walking across the passageway, and when you are halfway across, pretend that you've been pricked by a thorn, and leave the rest to us. But act natural."

The maiden began crossing the passageway, and she was dressed in a pink gown wearing bracelets, a necklace, and precious gems. The king had never seen anything like her in the world. Suddenly, she cried out, "I'm dying! I've been pricked by a thorn!"

After she fainted, the fairies picked her up and brought her back to her palace. The king, who had been expecting her at the other end of the passageway, wanted to run and help her, but she had given orders that he was never to cross, and he began to bite his lips.

Her leg became swollen, and the doctors arrived for consultations. Her condition worsened, and a priest attended the empress with the viaticum. But the king was not allowed to go and see her. After forty days the infection subsided so that the empress began recuperating and began to feel well.

Some time passed, and the king asked whether could see her. So the fairies said to her, "Tell him that you will come to visit him, but he must build a passage way carpeted with three feet of jasmine petals. When you are halfway across, you're to pretend that you've been pricked by another thorn."

The king was ready and had a large carpet made with jasmine petals. When everything had been prepared, the princess, dressed as an empress, began to cross the passageway. The king was at the other end of the passageway with his eyes set on her, for he feared that the poor maiden might be pricked by a thorn. Then, halfway across, there was a cry: "Oww! I'm dying! There's a thorn stuck in my foot!"

She fainted, and the ladies in waiting picked her up and carried her back to her palace. Just imagine how the king felt! He began to bite his nails and tear out his hair. He sent his servants to her time and again, but there was no way to see her, and he was not allowed to cross over through the passageway. All he could do was hit his head against a wall. After three or four weeks, the poor man was so tormented that he became sick, but he kept sending his servants to her palace to see how the empress was doing. After a while, she gave him permission to come and see her, even though he was very sick.

"Finally," she said to one of his servants, "what does this king want from me? After all, he nearly drove me to death."

"He wants to marry you," the servant said.

"Well then, tell him, that if he wants me, he must pretend to be dead and have himself put into a coffin. Then he must have the coffin carried beneath my palace window. Then I shall take him for my husband."

Even though this was terribly disagreeable for the king, he ordered a coffin to be made at once with beautiful materials, and he had himself placed on top of it pretending to be dead. Then his servants carried him to the palace of the empress. When she heard them arrive from her balcony, she looked down at him and cried out, "Phew! I spit in your face because you've done all this for the sake of a woman!" And indeed, she spit on him.

When the king heard how angrily she cursed him, he recalled that she was the maiden who had liberated him and that he had spit on her in the same manner. As soon as his servants brought him back to his palace, he immediately sent a message to her and asked if he could speak with her.

But the fairies, who had always gone to battle for the princess, sent him a message that said, "No, my lord. Thank you for wanting to speak with our mistress, but you can't come here. Did your majesty think that you were dealing with some coarse gossip when you spit on her! And now you know that she is the daughter of a crowned king. Since you destroyed her life, she will now destroy yours, and you can hit your head against the wall as long as you like because our empress doesn't want you!"

Well, do you know how things ended for the king? Since he was suffering so much and was about to lose his life, the fairies gave him permission to cross the passageway. So the king went across, and when he stood before the princess, he asked her pardon, and everything was settled. They immediately went to the royal chapel and were married. The king wanted the fairies to remain with them. However, they insisted on leaving, bade them a beautiful farewell and disappeared. Then the princess sent for her father and mother, and they held a grand celebration for the entire kingdom.

So they remained happy and content,  
While we still don't have a single cent.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 102. THE RED FISH

Once there was an old fisherman, so it's been told time and again, who was always burdened and had bad luck. One day his children were weeping because they were hungry, and his wife was sick. And he couldn't stand all this anymore. So he went to throw himself into the sea.

"Oh, what evil fortune I've had! I've always been crossed by bad luck that's driving me to take away my life and destroy the very core of my heart! Oh cursed luck, collect me at the bottom of this sea!"

And *whoosh* he threw himself head downward into the water.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" asked a red fish that took him on his back and carried him to a reef. "Now, get out of here, you poor fisherman," the fish said. "Fortune is with you, and you must learn to take advantage of all the riches that the sea has to offer you."

When the fish finished speaking, it turned into a beautiful maiden, an angel with gold hair, a siren of the sea. Turning to the fisherman she said, "Listen to me, oh fisherman, if you want the riches that I told you about, you must come here every day at daybreak, bring a fishing rod and nets, and then call me and say to me three times:

'Oh, Siren of the sea,  
Bring those rare fish to me,  
For I've come early in the morning  
And beg you to let me do my fishing.' "

The siren turned back into a fish and swiftly dove into the water. The fisherman went and fetched a fishing rod and nets, and within seconds he caught the best fish which were a real treasure. In this way, every morning before the birds awoke, he went to gather the fish. He called to the siren three times, and she appeared in the form of a red fish and brought him royal and magnificent fish. After many years of going back and forth every morning in this way without ever stopping, the poor fisherman became the richest man on the earth. He had more palaces and money than anything that had ever been seen before in those parts of the world.

He lived happy and content  
And we still don't have one cent.

*Told by Francesca Leto to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

### 103. THE THREE STORIES OF THE THREE MERCHANTS' SONS

Once upon a time there were three merchants' sons. Each one of them had a father, and they loved each other just as much as they loved their own eyes. One time the three fathers said to their sons, "Do you want to go hunting tomorrow?"

"Yes," they all said and went to bed. During the night, the first merchant's son got up, and the clear moon seemed to him to be as bright as daylight. He put on his hunting clothes, went outside, and called his friends. Once all three were together, they began to walk, and while they were walking, there was a thunderstorm, and it began to pour barrels of rain. All three of them were soaked to their skins. They became lost, and as they wandered about, they noticed a light in the distance.

"Let's head over there."

They walked and walked toward the light that was in front of a palace. When they entered, a boy dressed in fine garments greeted them.

"What do you want at this hour?"

"We would like shelter for the night."

"Wait," the boy said, "and I'll go and ask permission from my mistress." And he went upstairs.

"Madam, there are three young men soaked to their skin. Do you want to give them shelter and permission to stay for the night?"

"Yes, let them enter."

They went upstairs, and when the woman saw them, she asked them to sit down and rest, and then she said, "I am a widow, and I'm going to give you my husband's clothes to wear. In the meantime, take off your clothes so they can dry."

As the day began to dawn, she prepared a good breakfast, and the three young men felt restored.

"Ah, madam, how can we repay you for all the good that you've done for us?"

"It's nothing," the woman said to them. "It's my pleasure to give, and I want nothing in return except that each one of you is to tell me a story. In the meantime, your clothes will dry."

The oldest of the three young men began and said, "I'll tell you about a little episode that happened to me, but I don't know whether you'll like it."

"Tell it!" the woman responded. "Tell it."

The young man began,

Well then, madam, I am the son of a merchant, and one day my father sent me to sell some merchandise. He gave me a guard, money, and everything I needed. While we traveled, the guard rode ahead of me, and I was in the rear. Suddenly, a masked rogue appeared—he had been sent to do this—and seized me. Then he took me to a lodge where there was an iron cage with many good people inside.

“Who are you?” I asked one of the good people, and they could only make some signs with their hands that said,

“Now you’ll be thrown in here.”

But they couldn’t explain anything more to me because a giant was there, and it was he who kidnapped people and threw them into the cage. To be brief, some people took me and stuck me into the cage, and the giant was delighted. As soon as I entered, I asked my companions: “Well, what are we to do?”

“Be quiet,” they said to me. “Each morning the giant takes one of us and eats him. Each time he chooses the fattest among us.”

(While the young man was telling the story, the woman became distressed and said, “Poor boy, how is it that you’re still alive?”)

To be brief, each morning, as soon as the giant arrived, I hid behind the others. One time, when the giant wanted to amuse himself, he took a guitar and began to play it. As he was playing it, the strings broke, and he turned and said, “Well, well, I’ll tell you what: I’ll set free whoever can fix the guitar.”

As soon as I heard him say this, I cried out in a loud voice: “Here, sir! I’m a guitarist, my father’s a guitarist, and my uncle’s a guitarist! Everyone in my family’s been a guitarist for ages!”

“Enough! Enough!” the prisoners said. “We’ve got the point. We’ve got the point.”

“Get him out of there!” the giant ordered.

The guard took me out and led me to the giant. I took the guitar, saw what was broken, and fixed everything just right. After I had done this for him, the giant caressed me and put a ring on my finger. It was one and the same thing to me, to have the ring and to be free. I rushed outside of the room, and I ran and ran until I was at the entrance of the lodge. “Oh, poor me! I’m still here!” I began to run again. I ran and ran, and I found myself at the entrance of the lodge once more. In the meantime I heard, “Psst, psst.” I raised my eyes and saw a young woman sitting on a balcony who said to me softly, so softly that the giant couldn’t hear.

“Cut off your finger!”

“I don’t have a pocket knife.”

"I'll give you one."

And she threw me the pocket knife. There was a pillar in front of the entrance, and I leaned my hand against the pillar and cut off my finger. By cutting off the finger, I was able to get out, and I headed straight toward my father's house. And this was how my life was saved.

The woman who heard the story could only say, "You poor boy! You poor boy!" Then, she said to one of the others, "Now you tell me a story. You there."

Well then, madam, my father, a merchant, gave me a certain amount of money to go on a business trip. I embarked on a ship, but no sooner did we depart than a great storm erupted, and we had to dump all the merchandise at sea. Day after day passed, and each day the food became more scarce, and the bad weather continued. We arrived at the point where all the provisions were gone. The captain said: "Men, we have no more provisions. It's time for us to write our names on pieces of paper. Each morning we shall pick one and kill whoever's name is on the paper. Then we'll each eat a piece of him to keep us alive."

Just think, madam, how frightened we were by this news! Well, each morning, we picked a slip of paper, and right after choosing someone, we chopped him up, and each one of us ate a piece. Finally, only the captain and I were left. The next morning, we were to pick the slips of paper. I thought that if I picked the right paper, I would kill him, but if the captain picked the right one, I would never let him kill me. We chose, and the captain's name was picked. The poor captain, the poor man! He opened his arms and said to me: "Here I am, my brother." And I killed him while my heart cried out. I tied a quarter of his flesh with rope, and I prepared the other three pieces for the entire week. To be brief, an eagle came, grabbed a quarter of the captain with its claws, and carried it away. "Poor me! What was I to do?" I took another quarter of the flesh and tied it to the masthead. But the eagle arrived again and took it away with its beak. "Poor me! What was I to do? But I must really see what I can do . . ." I took the last quarter, tied it, and hid. The eagle arrived, and while it was devouring the quarter of flesh, I grabbed hold of it and climbed on its back. The eagle flew off, and as it was flying, it dropped me on top of a mountain. I fell down and tumbled here and there, but I was able to escape death and returned to my home.

"Poor boy! Poor boy!" the lady said. "Your story, too, is distressing. Now you tell me one," she said to the other young man.

My lady, if you hear my tale, you will begin to weep. But here it is nonetheless.

My father sent me on a business trip. At the end of the first day I arrived at an inn. The innkeeper gave me a room for the night, and I ate and went to bed. But I always say my prayers before I sleep, and when I finished them, I knelt down to kiss the ground and saw something. It was a dead man stretched out, very stiff, spread out beneath the bed. When I saw that, I said, "This man's been lying there since the other night. This inn must be a place where they murder people. Later they'll come and murder me." What was I to do? Well, I took the dead man and dumped him on to the bed, and I spread myself out beneath the bed without daring to breathe. After a short time had passed, I heard the door open, and I saw the innkeeper with a knife in his hands, his servant with a hammer, and his wife holding a lamp. They approached the bed.

"He's all sound asleep," they said. "Let's get to work!"

They began to hit and stab the dead man on his forehead. Then the innkeeper said: "Let's pick him up and put him under the bed, and we'll throw the corpse that's under the bed out the window."

My lady, at this point, my heart was completely frozen. But the innkeeper's wife said: "Let's just go now. We can talk about everything tomorrow."

And since it was God's will, they left the room with me still under the bed. As soon as I heard them go down the stairs, I got out from beneath the bed and waited for the day to come. At the break of dawn, I went out onto the balcony and waved to the people passing by. Finally, the judge arrived, and he went to the innkeeper, who opened the door. The judge climbed the stairs, and he found quite a spectacle when he entered the room. As soon as I told the judge everything, I departed and returned to my father's house and even now it doesn't seem real to me. And that's my tale.

After the three stories were finished, the lady said, "My poor boys! My poor boys! How much you must have suffered! I myself do not know which of you has suffered the most. If I knew which of you deserved the most compassion, I would take him for my husband."

And she is still there trying to decide which of the three deserves her compassion most.

*Told by Rosalia Varrica in Palermo.*

## 104. BEAUTY WITH THE GOLD STAR

There was a father and a mother, so it's been told, and they had a son as pretty as a picture and as tall as a flagpole. They loved him very much, for he was the light of their eyes. But fearing that the fairies might kidnap him, they never let him go out to play.

"What a golden flagpole," the people exclaimed. "It would be fitting if he had the Beauty with the Gold Star at his side!"

When the young man heard these words, he began to get some ideas. He felt them on that day and the next, and kept having them until he was about twenty-one and had become very popular with everyone because he was valiant and fearless and had gathered more knowledge and science than anyone else had possessed in his country.

"It's time for me to search for Beauty with the Gold Star," he said, "especially since I know everything there is to know and can overcome any kind of magic spell."

But his father and mother said, "Son, you're crazy to desire the Beauty with the Gold Star! Don't you know that you will have to break the most powerful magic spell in the world to conquer her? And how are you going to defeat the ogre? What about Mamma-draga, the ogress? Finally, what about the serpent with the seven poison tongues? Oh, son, we shall lose you! Think of how many kings and emperors have already lost their lives!"

But all their laments and desperate pleas were to no avail. The young man remained firm in his decision to depart.

"The Beauty with the Gold Star will be mine, or I shall pay the cost with my life," and after saying this, he took a sturdy horse and his sword and headed into the countryside in search of the beautiful woman.

He rode and rode hundreds of miles, but nobody could tell him where he might find her. Then, one night, when it had become dark and he was in a forest, he lost his way and could neither advance nor retreat. Consequently, he became discouraged because every hour lost seemed to him as if he had lost a thousand years. He was so obsessed by his desire to find the Beauty with the Gold Star that he hadn't slept a wink during the first month of his journey, neither day nor night, and he had not stopped in any country.

Well, no sooner did it become dark in the middle of this forest where he had lost his way than he was forced to get off his horse, and he sat down beneath a tree. Toward midnight, he was still wide awake (because he always kept himself alert and thought continually about Beauty) and heard some music coming toward him. His attention was drawn to this music, which was

very sweet and charming and grew louder. He looked around, but saw nothing but darkness. After a few minutes passed, however, a light glistened from afar that, within seconds, formed a spectacle that stopped in front of him.

The young man, let's call him Peppi, became terrified. The grand spectacle consisted of seven fairies, one more beautiful than the next, each one dressed in white. They began to dance around the tree where Peppi was sitting, and he watched them without making a move or saying one word. Finally, when a wand was waved, they stopped.

"Peppi," the eldest fairy said, "what are you doing here all by yourself at midnight?"

"What do you think I'm doing? I've lost my way while searching for the Beauty with the Gold Star."

"Ohh, my son, there have been many young men better than you who have tossed away their lives! You have no idea what great pride the Beauty with the Gold Star has! You have no idea what it takes and what dangers you'll face just to find her!"

"But what can I do?" Peppi replied. "I'm obsessed by her, and there's nothing I can do but to search for her. Either I'll succeed, or I'll lose my skin just like the others have."

Upon hearing these words, the fairy danced around the tree and said, "I'm pleased that you're searching for the Beauty with the Gold Star because she would be the right maiden for you. But you are poor, and she's rich. You are likable, and she's proud. You're searching without arms, and she has ogres and serpents that defend her. But enough . . . I want to help you. Here is a nut that can be useful to you!"

Then the other six fairies also turned to him, and after a dance, they said, "We, too, want to help you. Take this!" And each one gave him a nut. Then they danced around the tree and disappeared into the air and the darkness just as before.

For Peppi, who had remained beneath the tree, all these things seemed to have been a dream or a vision. But after hearing the words of the fairy, he became more eager than ever to follow his path. He stood up and saw a light in the distance similar to a tiny lamp. "That's where I must go," he said to himself. "Perhaps I'll find my way." So he got on his horse and rode in the direction of the light, and as he approached it, the light seemed to become larger. Finally, when he arrived at the spot, he saw that it was a fire, and on top of it was a large kettle that was boiling. Beside the kettle was an old ragged man with a white beard that went down to his toes. He was holding a large pitchfork that he was using to stir the contents of the kettle.

"My good old man," Peppi said, "what are you doing?"

"It's been three thousand years," he replied, "that I've been condemned to stir in this kettle, and there's no end to my toil. I turn and turn this pitchfork to pay off my sentence of condemnation!"

He turned and turned and kept stirring and looking into the kettle.

"Oh, you poor old man," Peppi cried out. "Why have you been condemned to lead such a life?"

"Oh, my son, human vices are to blame because they have wound up in this kettle that used to be filled only with virtues. But now the virtues have sunk to the bottom, and the vices dominate. And I must keep stirring until I see at least one of the virtues glisten again. Time is needed, my son. Time is needed, and only with time will some virtues float to the surface."

"What strange things! Can I see how all this works?" Peppi asked.

"Look, my son," the old man said to him, "all these little round spheres keep floating, very slowly, and they have many colors—red, yellow, green, black, impure—and they're the vices. Some spheres that you may see glittering at times are gold, but since they are heavy, they remain at the bottom. Every now and then they appear on the surface only due to the passing of time and my stirring."

"Ahh, poor old man," Peppi said, "now I see why you're so tired from all this work over the years. If you want me to stir a little, I could do this while you rest."

"You would do this?"

"Of course!"

"Let's see!"

So, Peppi took the old man's pitchfork and began to stir with all his might. He turned, turned, and turned and continued to stir while looking into the kettle.

"Very good!" the old man said. "Now I'll rest a while!"

"Certainly! For the time being I'm the one who's stirring!" Peppi replied.

For the rest of the day Peppi kept stirring. Then he called the old man and said, "I must go now because I am searching for the Beauty with the Gold Star."

The old man wept and embraced him.

"I can't tell you how much I owe you for allowing me to rest after three thousand years during which time I was unable to close my eyes and sit down. Take this, my son! I want to help you in the task you've undertaken. Take this hair from my beard. It could be useful to you."

As he said this, he tore out a long piece of hair from his beard and gave it to him. Then he added, "I want you to know that at the end of these woods there are seven rivers, seven mountains, and seven forests. Once you pass through

these seven rivers, mountains, and forests, you will find the territory of the Beauty with the Gold Star.”

After listening to the old man, Peppi took his leave and continued on his way. He rode and rode until the end of the woods where he came across the seven rivers. He descended with his horse, but since he could not feel the bottom, he started to swim. Indeed, he swam and swam, but there was no end to the river, and he couldn't reach the other bank even though it appeared as though he could touch it with his hand. The horse was taking deep breaths and could barely continue so that Peppi cried out, “Poor me! How will I ever get out of this?” Just then he thought it would be a good idea to crack one of the nuts—and then, within seconds, the horse was able to carry him through the seven rivers.

So, Peppi continued on his way and reached the seven mountains.

“Oh, for the fear of God,” Peppi said, “who can climb these mountains?”

There were seven mountains as tall as giants, almost vertical, without even a bush, so smooth that they sparkled like bronze. Peppi spurred the horse on and tried to climb one of the mountains. But how could he climb? He slid down as though the mountain was made of soap. He tried again taking off the horse's shoes, but it was in vain. They would arrive at the middle point and would then slide down to their starting place. Then Peppi decided to crack the second nut, and the horse soared like a bird and sprung from one peak to the other until it had passed all seven mountains.

But there were still the seven forests. Peppi entered them easily, but as soon as he was inside, he felt lost. There were thickets all over the place, large crevices, ravines, and logs as big as mountains. And that was nothing: there was a dense and impenetrable darkness—sometimes rabid wolves attacked him; sometimes, they attacked the horse. He spurred the horse on, but no matter how much they jumped across crevices and rocks and descended into deep gorges, they always returned to the same spot.

The worst for Peppi were the wolves because they attacked him from the side, and he became discouraged. So he took out another nut and opened it. As soon as he did this, the horse scaled all seven forests with one jump, and they found themselves outside them. When he looked around him, the first thing he saw was a great field filled with roses and flowers. It was the territory of Beauty with the Gold Star. As he rode onward, he saw that the ground was covered with bones of dead men, swords, saddles, corpses of horses, and blood-stained stones. His heart beat strongly, and in order not to see anything, he stayed on the path. But the further he advanced, the more the bones of dead men increased. So Peppi, instead of looking at the ground, stared straight ahead toward the palace of Beauty that was already shining from a

distance as though it were completely made of diamonds. But all of a sudden the ogre appeared in front of him and gave him a blow on his head with his club and said, "Ah, you sneak! What do you think you're doing here? Just wait and see what a thrashing I'm going to give you! It's been a long time since I've eaten human flesh!"

However, Peppi took out his sword so swiftly that he managed to cut the club from the ogre's hand right away and was about to chop off his head when the ogre, sensing that he had lost the battle, cried out, "Ogre I am, crocodile I'll become!" And all at once he became a crocodile with such a large mouth that Peppi and his horse could have entered it. But Peppi broke open another nut, and the crocodile became the ogre again. Then with one blow with his sword, Peppi cut off his head and put it into the saddle bag.

No sooner had he killed the ogre than Peppi rode straight to the Beauty's palace just at the moment that she appeared. What a beautiful sight! On her forehead there was a star that glistened so brightly that nobody was able to look at it, and Peppi was dazzled by it. When Beauty saw the handsome young man, she felt the flame of love and let him enter because he was the first man virtuous enough to have reached her. At that moment a great roar could be heard as though a storm were coming from the sea.

"Ah," the Beauty with the Gold Star said, "what are we going to do? Mamma-draga is coming. Hide yourself in this little room!"

Soon Mamma-draga entered:

"Ahha! I smell some human meat!

Just what I want tonight to eat!"

"What are you saying, mother? Who would want to come here?"

"But I smell the odor. I smell it! What an odor! What an odor!" and the ogress ran toward the little room. Peppi, who had heard her talking, was ready with the sword in his hand and immediately dealt Mamma-draga some furious blows while she tried to stuff his head down her enormous throat. However, Peppi managed to strike with his sword so that she fell to the ground in pieces.

"Ogress I am, tiger I shall become," Mamma-draga cried out at this point, and she became such a ferocious tiger that Peppi saw that he was about to lose the fight. So he cracked a nut, and immediately the tiger turned back into an old witch. Without hesitating, Peppi chopped off her head with a blow of his sword and put it into the saddle bag.

"Now," Beauty with the Gold Star said, "if you want me, you must break the magic spell. Take these heads, and come with me. You can only have me if you kill the serpent with the seven poison tongues."

They descended into a cellar where there was a well. Then Beauty took a

long cord, tied it around Peppi's waist, and gave him a lamp. Before lowering him down into the well, she said, "Listen, when you climb down, you'll find a dark room filled with smoke and the stench of sulfur coming from a hole. Throw the heads of the ogres into the hole, and you'll see that as soon as they are burned, the smoke and smell will stop. Then you're to enter the hole where you'll find the serpent. The rest is up to you!"

Peppi descended and followed Beauty's instructions. He found himself in a room that had no end to it. So he began walking and passed hundreds of rooms all the same. He kept moving and moving and had no idea where he was. He turned around and always returned to the same spot. He had already walked an entire day, and the more he walked, the more he lost the way until it was dark all over and he couldn't see a thing. So, his spirits dampened, and he broke another nut. All at once he saw something glimmer off to a side, and he headed in that direction where he found the serpent with the seven poison tongues. As soon as the serpent saw Peppi, it tried to make him believe that it wanted to help him.

"Come, my son," the serpent said, "I'll give you the keys that will enable you to leave the palace with the Beauty with the Gold Star. Come, come, come . . ." And as the serpent said this, it stuck out the seven tongues that were like seven swords, and it attacked Peppi.

"Ah, you vile trickster!" Peppi exclaimed. "So this is your game!" And he began to take out his sword. But what happened! It was as if he were digging up water and sowing the wind! His sword hit the serpent's body as though it were cotton and did not even leave a mark. In turn, the serpent opened its mouth and tried to grab the nape of his neck. And here Peppi cracked the last nut (it was the seventh)—suddenly, the serpent remained immobile with its mouth open just the way it was. Peppi got on top of it and cut out the seven tongues, and the serpent fell to the ground; its corpse was just as cold as it was long.

As soon as Peppi had killed the serpent, he returned the way he had come, feeling his way in the darkness, since the lamp had gone out when he had become lost. Finally he reached the place where the cord was and gave a signal to the Beauty with the Gold Star, who helped him climb up.

"Now we can get out of here! The serpent is dead, and I have the keys of the palace with me!"

But Beauty's response was to turn her back on him and to retire into her rooms. Peppi followed her and said, "What's going on? Are you joking? After I've done all these things and faced so many dangers, you're going to leave me?"

But she remained silent and once again turned her back on him. What do

you expect? Women! At first she told Peppi that she wanted him with all her heart—and afterward she withdrew and amused herself. Peppi pleaded with her in vain and tried in every way he could to persuade her to come with him. After two months of trying he was at his wits' end. So what did he do? He took the hair that he had received from the old man and threw it around his shoulders. You should have seen what happened! She ran after him, grabbed him by his arm, and kneeled down at his feet to ask his pardon.

At this point he gathered together the enormous riches of the palace that filled seven wagons. Since the magic spell had been broken, they got on their horses, opened the gates, and left the palace. Eventually they reached Peppi's home where he bought the most beautiful palace, and they got married.

Now they remained happy and content  
While we still don't have one single cent.

*Told by Nina Fedele to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 105. THE FINICKY PRINCESS

**T**his tale's been told time and again about a king, who once upon a time ago had a daughter who was as beautiful as could be. When she had reached an age when it was time to get married, the king summoned her one day and said, "My daughter, you've now reached the age when you need to marry. So, I'm going to inform all the kings, who are friends of mine, that I shall be holding a great celebration and shall invite them with all their families. This way, my daughter, you will be able to see which prince pleases you the most."

The day arrived, and all the kings came with their families. The king invited them to dine with him later at noon. Meanwhile, his daughter looked them over and fell in love with the son of King Garnet. So she told her father and well, you know how things spread among friends . . . In short, the son of King Garnet learned about her choice and was very happy. Just imagine the grand feast that was prepared! At noon everyone sat down to eat at the table. At the end of the meal, pomegranates were served. The prince had never eaten a pomegranate before, and it was embarrassing for him when he dropped a seed on the floor. So what did he do? He kneeled down on the floor and picked it up. What a sight! When the princess, who could not keep her eyes off him, saw this, she got up from the table, ran to her room, and shut the door. Then her father got up from the table and went to see what was wrong with his

daughter. When he saw her, she said, "Papa, I really liked this young man, but now that I've seen his shabby manners, I don't want him anymore."

So, the king thanked all the other monarchs for coming and said farewell to them. But the son of King Garnet knew what had happened, and therefore, he had no intention of leaving. And what do you think he did? He disguised himself and remained in the kingdom. Moreover, he looked for a way to enter the royal palace. One day, he found out that the royal gardener had left, and the palace was looking for a good gardener to replace him. Well, since the prince knew a good deal about gardening, what do you think he did? He dressed himself as a peasant and applied for the job. They came to an understanding about the salary, and after he asked what he had to do, he became the gardener of the royal palace and was given a cottage where he hid the gifts that he had intended to give his betrothed. He made it seem that the trunk was filled with his own clothing and left it in the cottage in the middle of the garden.

The next morning he spread out a beautiful silk shawl embroidered in gold that glistened brightly. The window of the princess faced the garden, and each morning the princess stood by her window. One morning, she got up, went to the window, and noticed the shawl which appealed to her very much. So, she called to the gardener.

"Tell me," she said, "whose shawl is that?"

"That shawl's mine," he replied.

"Do you want to sell it to me?"

"Never."

After she heard this, she commanded her servants to see if they could persuade him to sell it to her. But no matter how much they tried to buy the shawl, it was all in vain. Then they endeavored to get him to exchange it for something else. However, this too was in vain. The only thing he said to them was, "I'll give the shawl to the princess if she lets me sleep in the first room of her apartments."

The servants burst out laughing and ran to their mistress, and after giving her the message and discussing it, the princess agreed. She went to get the shawl and told him that the servants would call him when the time came. That night, after everyone had gone to bed, they called him and let him enter. Early the next morning they woke him and showed him out.

After a week had passed, the gardener spread out another shawl as beautiful as the first but more lavish. The princess wanted it. However, the gardener asked to be allowed to sleep in the second room of her apartments. And she consented.

Another week passed, and he spread out a dress embroidered in gold and

ornamented with a large quantity of pearls and diamonds. The princess went crazy about the dress, but there was nothing she could do but to let him sleep in the antechamber of the room where she herself slept. She was not afraid because everyone considered him somewhat insane. Poor boy! This time, however, she paid the price.

After the gardener was convinced that everyone was sleeping, he went to bed and pretended to fall asleep. After some time passed, he began to tremble all over, and since his bed was propped next to the door, everything began to tremble, and the noise woke the princess. She told him to be quiet, but he responded that he felt cold and made even more of a racket. After a while she saw that it was impossible to try to reason with him and make herself heard, and since everyone might hear the noise and would be displeased, especially since the gardener was insane, she got out of her bed and let him into her room. Well, what do you think he did after the princess went back to sleep? In the morning, he got up early and left the room.

Some time later the princess discovered that she was pregnant, and what was she to do? Indeed, she became so angry she stopped eating, but she watched her belly grow and grow and was worried that everyone would notice it. In desperation she went to the gardener and spoke with him, and he told her that there was no other remedy but to flee with him. Even though he was really ugly, the poor princess was afraid of being dishonored. So she agreed to flee with him and took some clothes and a purse filled with money. That night they ran away on foot.

Along the way they met cowherds and shepherds and passed by many estates and fields.

"Who owns all those cattle?"

"They belong to King Garnet."

"Ah!"

"Why? What's wrong?" the gardener asked.

"This was the man I didn't want to marry," she replied.

"Too bad for you!" And this is what the gardener said to her each time she asked him who owned the estates, the fields, the horses, and the sheep they saw.

With the help of God, they managed to make their way. By night they were freezing, sweating, and dead tired. The gardener had told her that he was the son of King Garnet's steward. Finally they reached a tiny hut where there was a little bed, a stove, and a fireplace. Outside there was the henhouse and another dwelling that was the barn. He told her to slaughter a chicken and cook it for him, and she filled the stove with the feathers. After they ate, they went to bed. The next morning, before he left, he told her he would return in

the evening. After he departed, some time passed, and soon King Garnet's son, dressed in his royal clothes, appeared and began to ask her who she was.

"I'm the wife of the steward's son."

"As far as I'm concerned you don't seem to be a good woman. You seem like a thief."

Well, what do you think he did? He gathered together all the chickens and counted them. Then he told her that they had all been there the day before, and now one was missing. Then he began to look through the hut, and when he found the feathers in the stove, he gave her hell. Then he beat her and slapped her. Finally, he said to her, "If it wasn't for me, you'd be turned over to the police. You might be able to do something like this in your country, but you had better get to know our laws."

The poor maiden began to cry. Meanwhile, the prince's mother heard all this noise and summoned her. When the princess entered the palace, the queen mother gave her a cup of coffee and told her that her son was strange and she need not worry about him. "Right now I have a daughter-in-law, who is pregnant, and I must get the baby clothes ready. Do you want to help me with the sewing?"

The princess said yes, and the queen mother laid out a good number of baby shirts, pullovers, diapers, and bits of cloth for sewing. When the gardener returned in the evening, she wept and told him about everything that had happened and said that he was to blame.

"I don't want to stay here any longer," she said. "Let's go to another cottage."

After he comforted her, they went to bed.

The next day, before he left, he told her as usual that he would return in the evening. Then he added that she was to steal some baby clothes from the queen and some other things and stuff them beneath her blouse because these things were scarce, very scarce, and since she was pregnant, she would need some clothes for the baby when the time came for it to be born. So after he departed, the queen summoned her, and they began to sew. When the queen wasn't looking, she took some baby clothes and stuffed them beneath her blouse. Just then the prince entered and said to the queen, "Mama, who's this maiden working with you? Why have you hired this thief? She's capable of stealing everything!"

Well, what do you think he did? He grabbed her and stuck his hand beneath her blouse, and he pulled out the baby clothes. Just imagine how mortified the poor maiden felt! Then he gave her a terrible scolding, but the queen his mother did not approve of what he did.

"Enough!" she said. "These are women's affairs, and they don't concern you!"

Then she comforted the maiden who wept her heart out, and after she stopped, the queen told her to come the next day, "We can string some pearls."

That night, when the gardener returned home, his wife told him everything that had happened. Then he responded and said that the king was greedy and that she shouldn't let him trample on her. "Instead," he said, "you should try to steal a string of pearls and put them in your pocket."

And this is what she did. The next day, the queen summoned her, and they began to string some pearls. When the queen left her for a moment, she stuck a string of pearls into her pocket. After some time passed and the queen returned, who should come by but the prince. When he saw the maiden, he said to his mother, "You're giving this thief pearls? Let's see how many she's stolen!"

Without much ado, he stuck his hand into her pocket, and he pulled out the string of pearls. I can't tell you or recount what the prince did, and what he said to her, but as far as the maiden is concerned, I can tell you that she fainted. The queen brought her smelling salts and gave her some water to drink. Thank God, she revived!

That night the gardener returned home, and the maiden told him what had happened. Since she didn't feel well, she went to bed without eating. The next day her labor pains began because the time had arrived, and she began to suffer. Meanwhile, her husband, who hadn't noticed her pains, told her that he would return in the evening and left. The pains became more intense so that her cries were heard by the queen who came to her and said, "Good woman, the midwife is here because my daughter-in-law has labor pains. Get up, and we'll have the midwife visit you."

In short, she got up and was embarrassed. When the midwife visited her, she said that the maiden was about to give birth, and in fact, she did give birth to a handsome baby boy, and the queen brought her to the palace where there was a magnificent bed. Soon thereafter the prince arrived and entered the room. When he saw her, he called his mother and said, "How could you give this thief such a bed?"

But the poor maiden started complaining about the prince, and when the queen heard this, she said, "My daughter, this man is your husband whom you wouldn't marry because of the pomegranate seed."

Then the prince told her all that he had done. So he wrote to her father. Indeed, after her family came, they were married in a grand ceremony. All the neighboring monarchs were invited, and there were three days of festivities.

They remained happy and content  
While we were left without a cent.

*Collected by Professor Ugo Antonio Amico in Erice.*

## 106. THE KING

There's a tale told time and again about a king who once upon a time had three sons who said, "Papa, we'd like to go out into the world and have some fun, but we need money."

So, the king gave it to them, and off they went and eventually found themselves in a forest. The first brother said, "Listen, we must take turns sleeping one at a time and guard against any animal that might come near and kill us."

"Yes," answered the second brother, "we'll each sleep a bit, as God wills it."

And so the youngest and middle brothers went to sleep first, leaving the oldest brother awake. Well, along came a beast with two heads. The youth saw him and called out, "Oh, sir, be careful not to wake up my two brothers!"

When the creature came closer, the youth took his sword and knife and killed it. Then he cut out its two tongues, put them in a pouch, slung the dead beast over his shoulder, and went off and threw it as far away as he could. Then he came back and called to his middle brother.

"Wake up! It's your turn now. I've been on my feet for a long time."

"Did you see anything?" his brother asked.

"Not a thing."

"Well, that makes me feel good."

"Well then, everything's fine."

Now the middle brother served as watchman during the night, and along came another beast, this time with five heads. The brother took his sword and knife, killed it, cut out its tongues, and threw the creature as far away as he could. As soon as he had the tongues in a pouch, he called to the youngest brother, "Wake up! It's almost daylight and I need to get some sleep."

So the youngest brother got up, and the middle brother went to sleep. While the youngest brother was acting as watchman, along came a beast with eight heads, and the youth seized his sword and knife and killed it. And what did he do next? He cut out the tongues, put them in a pouch, and carried the creature as far away as he could. But at this point he noticed a figure in the darkness. It had a red band right here—at the waist<sup>145</sup>—and had a lantern in its hand.

"Would you please give me your lantern?" the young man asked.

"Oh, no, my son," came the answer, "because if I did that, and dawn arrived, the two of us would perish."

145 Pitrè notes that at the word "here," the narrator, a young girl, makes a gesture toward her waist, so we have added these three words to our translation.

"Oh, please let me have it."

"All right," said the figure, "I'll hand it over, and you can carry it for me as long as dawn doesn't arrive."

Once the young man had the lantern, he could discern six figures in the dark. They were six men quarreling over who would get to marry a king's daughter, and they were all shouting, "I want her!"

"No, I want her!"

"No, I'm the one who wants her!"

The minute the princess saw the young man, she cried out, "Whoever comes in the door first will be my husband!" Well, who do you think got through the door first? The one with the lantern. The first thing he did was to slay the six suitors. And at that moment the king appeared.

"This princess must become my bride," said the young man.

"Fine," said the king, "she can be your bride."

"But first," said the youth, "I do have to go and call my brothers."

"You may call your brothers," said the king, "but first hear this: I'm going to give my daughter's hand to whoever among you has performed the greatest feats."

So the young man got his brothers and brought them to the king, who repeated his announcement. "I'll give my daughter's hand to whoever among you has performed the greatest feats."

"Your Majesty," said the oldest brother, "I killed a two-headed beast."

"And I killed a five-headed beast," said the middle brother.

"And I killed an eight-headed beast," said the youngest, "and besides, I killed six men right here to win the princess's hand."

"It's clear," said the king, "that you're the one who has performed the greatest feats, so my daughter is yours. Moreover, I'm taking the crown off my head and placing it on yours."

And so he put his crown on the young man's head and gave him his daughter in marriage. Then he took his other two daughters and married them to the other two brothers.

Now that they were all married, after some time had passed, the youngest brother said, "I'd like to pay father a visit."

"Yes, let's all go together," the brothers replied, and so they saddled up their horses and rode off with happy hearts.

But as they were riding along, it grew dark and a thick fog enveloped them. So the two older brothers took the opportunity to steal their younger brother's wife. The poor youth was disconsolate and burst into tears. "I can't go to father's house now," he said. "What will he think of me? I'll have to remain in this place." And so he did.

Now the weather improved, and since he felt very hungry, he went to the nearest farm to seek work.

"Do you need a shepherd?" he inquired.

"Yes, I can use you," replied the owner, "but look over there. Do you see that well with the big vaulted roof? I don't want you to take the sheep near that place."

"Why not?"

"Because sheep keep vanishing at that place, and I can't figure out why."

That's all the young fellow needed to hear. "That's where my wife must be," he said to himself. And then what did he do? He brought all the sheep to that very spot, and by evening, there were thirty sheep missing. When it was time to bring the sheep back to the farm, the owner said to him,

"Thirty of my sheep are missing!"

"Yes," replied the youth, "I took them to the well, and that's where they were lost."

"Didn't you hear my warning? You'd better leave, young fellow, because you've cost me thirty sheep."

So the poor youth had to leave. But on his way he saw an ant, a little bird, and a dove. They had all been hunting and were quarreling over their catch. The ant was saying, "You get the biggest piece, and I get the smallest!" The dove, which was the biggest among them, saw the young man and said, "All right, then, let's bring that young fellow over to help us. Hey there! Young man! Come and divide this meat for us!"

"I'm coming!" answered the youth, and he came and divided the meat. He gave this one portion to the ant, another to the little bird, and the largest to the dove,<sup>146</sup> since the dove was the biggest.

"Good!" they all exclaimed. "You did a fair job! Now what shall we give you as a reward?"

Then the ant pulled off one of its little feet and said to him, "Here, take this little foot and use it whenever you wish to turn into an ant." The little bird gave him one of his feathers and said, "Use this whenever you wish to become a bird." And the dove gave him one of its wings and said, "Use this whenever you want to become a dove." So the young man went off with these gifts and came to the well.

"I am a man," he declared, "and I want to become an ant."

Then he climbed up onto the roof and looked in, and there he saw his wife

146 Again the young narrator uses gestures to supplement her words. Pitre notes that she first touches the tip of her right index finger to the tip of her left index, then to the middle, and then to the base, illustrating the three different-sized portions.

in a room with an old man carrying a magnetic stone.<sup>147</sup> He was clapping his hands together and saying, “All of you maidens belong to me. You are all my wives.”

The young man waited until his wife went off to wash her face, and then he said, “I am an ant, and I want to become a man.”

As soon as he was a man again, his wife recognized him. Then he said to her, “Listen to my instructions, dear wife. When you go back inside, ask him, ‘Old magician of mine, tell me, what does one need to do to bring about two deaths?’ ”

Then the young man became an ant again, and the princess went back inside to the old man. When they had all retired for the night, she asked him,

“Old magician of mine, tell me, what does one need to do to bring about two deaths?”

“I’m not telling you, because if I do, you’ll reveal the secret.”

But the princess begged him again and again, until finally he gave in.

“All right, here’s what you must do. Do you see that devil up on the roof? To bring about two deaths, you must split him apart, take out his liver, and grind it up and eat it.”

Well, the next morning the young man turned into a bird, flew to the princess, and heard the secret. Then he went and got his weapons—his finely sharpened sword and everything else—and full of confidence he sliced through the devil’s neck, cut out his belly, and took his liver. Then he went up on the roof and began singing,

“Too-weet, too-weet, too-weet,  
His liver I did eat,  
Too-weet, too-weet, too-weet,  
His liver I did eat.”

As the old magician was dying, he cried out, “Oh! I’ve been betrayed! I’ve been betrayed!” And he fell dead.

Now inside that covered well there were not only young people, but also old people with beards reaching all the way to their feet. The princess and her husband left the old people there, but they took out all the young people and brought them back to all the different kingdoms they had come from. Then the young man put the crown on the princess’s head. So ends my story.

147 The word is *calamita*, meaning lodestone or magnet, but its function in the story is not clear. Because lodestones and magnets have seemingly magical properties, the popular imagination associated them with magicians.

And they remained happy and content,  
 While we stay here, without a cent.  
*Told by the young girl Maria Curàtolo in Erice.*

## 107. THE THREE IMPOVERISHED BROTHERS

Once there were three brothers, all of them really poor. The oldest brother had seven children and didn't have the means to feed them. One day he went out hoping to gather some soup greens, and he met a man who knew how to cast spells.

"You there, where are you going?" the man asked him.

"I'm hoping to find some soup greens to feed my children," he replied.

"Well, here's something I can offer you," said the man. "Take this magic rod, walk until you come to a large slab, and then stop. Strike the slab three times with the rod, and it will open. Inside you'll find a manikin holding a piece of wood in its hand. Take this wood and say, 'Open, sesame, and close, sesame!'<sup>148</sup> and you can take as much money as you want."

So the man found the spot, went inside, found the manikin, took the piece of wood, said "Open, sesame!" and found a vast treasure. He took as much as he could and carried it back to his house. When he knocked at the door, and his children saw him carrying something, they asked, "Did you get the soup greens?"

"I found something much better than soup greens," he said.

"What did you find?" they asked.

"Look," he said, and going to the bed he unloaded all his treasure until it filled the entire bed. From that point on, the man and his children had great feasts every single day. Now, his brothers knew very well how poor he was, and so they asked themselves, "How can it be that our impoverished brother has so much money to spend?"

So they went to him and said, "Well, dear brother, you certainly are living it up! Where did all this money come from? What clever scheme did you use to get it?"

"What can I tell you?" he replied. "It's simply that the good Lord wanted to do me a favor."

But his brothers continued to press him, until he was finally forced to tell them the whole story.

148 The original says "Open pepper, and close, pepper!" (*Gràpiti pipi, e chiuuti pipi!*).

Well, they immediately rushed to the spot, but they either forgot the words “Open, sesame, and close, sesame!” or they just didn’t bother to say them. Instead, they said “Open, sesame, and close, apricot!” When the treasure refused to open, they were obliged to return empty-handed and went to their brother to complain.

“What treasure were you talking about, brother? There was nothing there! We couldn’t get it to open.”

“Tell me one thing,” said the brother. “Exactly what words did you say to the manikin?”

“We said, ‘Open, sesame!’ and ‘Close, apricot!’ ”

“Well, no wonder it didn’t work. What I told you to say was, ‘Open sesame!’ and ‘Close, sesame!’ ”

The brothers realized that he was right, and the mistake was actually theirs. So they went back, and when they were inside, they said to the manikin, “Open, sesame! Close, sesame!” The treasure immediately opened, and they took as much as they could. But when they were ready to leave, the slab refused to move, and they remained trapped inside until they starved to death. *Collected in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 108. MASTER JOSEPH

**H**ere’s a tale they like to tell again and again. Once upon a time there were two brothers, one rich, and the other with the bad luck to fall on hard times. And since it is commonly said that a man is treated according to how well he dresses, Master Joseph,<sup>149</sup> which was the poor brother’s name, was largely ignored by his wealthy brother.

The time finally arrived when poor Master Joseph, unable to feed his family any longer, left home without even a goodbye, gave himself up for lost, and vanished from his village. Trusting in God and fate he walked until nightfall, when he found himself in the middle of a forest. There he sat down, took shelter under a bush, and fell asleep.

Now just at this time, a band of twelve robbers happened to be passing through the forest. They came upon Master Joseph, held him at knifepoint, and said, “You’d better make the sign of the cross because you’re a dead man!”

149 Here, as in other tales, the prefix “master” before a man’s first name indicates he is a master tradesman.

Master Joseph burst into tears and threw himself at their feet.

"I beg you, please have mercy on me," he said. "Don't kill me!"

Well, the robber chieftain was moved to pity and told his companions not to kill the man but to take him back with them to their cave. So Master Joseph got up behind one of the robbers on his horse, and just before dawn they all arrived at their mountain hideout. Upon arriving, the leader bent down to a large stone, and Joseph heard him say, "Open, sesame!"<sup>150</sup> The instant he said it, a door opened. They all entered, and the leader said, "Close, sesame!" and the door closed. The inside of the cave was filled with all the good things God created: cheese, meat, flour, and piles and piles of gold coins. Master Joseph said to himself, "Well, this might be a very good place for me!" So he gathered the horses with a whistle, settled them in their stable, and fed them some barley. The robber chieftain was pleased to see this and realized that this man had skills they could use. So he asked him to set the table and roast their meat, and Master Joseph served them all very well. The band of robbers ate and drank their fill, and then, totally exhausted, they all went to sleep.

When they woke up the next morning, the leader called Master Joseph, and said,

"Here are your tasks for today. We are going out to attend to our affairs, while you straighten up the house and cook the meat for tonight's dinner. If we are back for dinner, we'll all eat together. Otherwise, you should eat whatever you want, and throw the rest to the dogs."

Then the robbers mounted their horses, the leader said, "Open, sesame!" and the door opened wide. "Close, sesame!" and the door closed behind them. When Joseph heard these words again, he fixed them in his memory. Once the robbers were gone, he carefully did the housework and then set the table, cooked the meat, and awaited their return. But he waited in vain, because they didn't come back that night. So Master Joseph ate all that he wanted and threw the rest to the dogs. Then he said to himself, "Oh, my poor wife and children are dying of hunger at this very moment. How they would love to have the very food I'm throwing away!"

Gripped by remorse for his family, he had an idea. What did he do? He went to the pile of gold coins, filled a knapsack to the very brim, put it on his back, went to the door, and very softly said, "Open, sesame!" Once the door opened and he was outside, he said, "Close, sesame!" and the door closed behind him. Avoiding the road the robbers had taken, Master Joseph

150 Here, as elsewhere, we use this familiar English formula to translate the Sicilian "Open, pepper!" (*gràpiti pìpi!*).

took another road that went straight back to his village and arrived that night at his own front door. When he knocked, his wife answered, "Who's there?" Then she ran to let him in. Once inside, he went upstairs and found his children, all pale and sickly, weak with hunger. So he showed his wife the huge amount of money he had and said, "Now we can all live in style! Our fortune is made!"

But Master Joseph was no fool. At first, he didn't let the world know how much wealth he had. Indeed, he set up shop as a shoemaker and was careful about spending his money.

But the rich brother, whose name was Rocco, couldn't help but notice his brother's improved condition. His jealousy allowed him no peace, and he kept asking himself, "Where did my brother go to get all this money?" So he said to his wife, whose name was Maricchia, "Listen, Maricchia, I simply must know where my brother Peppi got his money. So, tomorrow, I'm inviting him and his wife to dine with us. Your job is to gain his wife's trust—because you women are good at that—and find out where his money came from."

Well, the plan worked, and Maricchia gained the confidence of her sister-in-law. She got her to reveal all the details, including the exact location of the mountain cave and the magic words for opening the door. As soon as she heard this, she went and told it all to her husband.

Now, this Rocco was one of those men who, the richer they are, the more wealth they crave. So he said to his wife that he, too, was going to that cave to collect some gold. She was anxious about letting him go there and tried to talk him out of it, but he was as obstinate as the man who insisted to the end that "they were scissors."<sup>151</sup>

"I insist on going, and you can't talk me out of it!" he declared.

"All right, then," said his wife, "go and see for yourself."

Now we can leave the two of them and go back to the robbers.

When their leader got back to the cave and found that a pile of gold was missing, he almost died on the spot. "By Saint So-and-So," he said, "how could I have lost all this wealth?" and he began swearing.<sup>152</sup> The other robbers ran around looking for Master Joseph on the chance that he might still be nearby, but the leader realized that this was of no use. He called together his men and said, "All right, my boys, it does no good to be upset about this. If

151 This alludes to tale 257 in this collection, "With the Scissors," in which an obstinate wife refuses to yield to her husband—even at the risk of drowning—in an argument over what instrument she used. This allusion shows that the narrator can assume an audience widely versed in the popular wisdom of this body of tales.

152 Pitrè explains this as characteristic of Sicilian "reticence" in cursing, where the storyteller wants to invoke the Devil with an expression like "By Saint Lucifer," but then censors himself.

the fellow is this greedy, he's bound to try again, and next time we'll be ready for him."

Well, as if he had guessed correctly, hardly a week passed when Master Joseph's brother turned up at the mountain cave. At first he hid behind a bush, keeping his eye on the door to see when the robbers left the cave. He had to wait a long time, and his patience had almost run out, when finally he saw the leader come out first, and then the rest of the robbers on horseback. "One, two, three . . ." he began counting, and thought he had counted all twelve of them. But with his thoughts so intently on all that money, the foolish Rocco was blinded by his greed and didn't realize that one robber was missing. When he judged that the robber band was far enough away, he approached the cave and said "Open, sesame, close sesame!" and entered the cave.

As soon as he was inside, the robber who had remained behind to guard the treasure pulled out his knife, and in four strokes he finished off poor Rocco and laid him out flat. Then, not content with just killing him, he cut his body up into little pieces, salted them, and packed them in a tuna barrel. When the robbers returned, they all believed it was Master Joseph who had been killed, and they held a celebration. "Now, my boys," said their leader, "we are finally safe."

After some time, when poor Rocco's wife realized that he wasn't ever going to return, she began tearing her hair and weeping for her husband as if he were dead. Soon Master Joseph heard her carrying on and became greatly upset. So he immediately headed back to the mountain, saying to himself, "You may have been right, you assassins, to kill my brother, but wait until you have to deal with me!"

When he arrived at the spot, he hid himself and waited for the robbers to come out. As they emerged, he counted them one at a time and made no mistake—there were exactly twelve. Once they had departed, Joseph said, "Open, sesame, and close, sesame!" and went inside. First, he searched for his brother and found him salted inside the tuna barrel. He stopped to shed some tears for his poor brother, and then he got to work. He took all the mules and saddlebags that were there, loaded them up with all the robbers' money including the barrel, and said, "Open, sesame, close, sesame!" and left the cave. He made his way back to his village, leading all the mules loaded with money. The first thing he did was to give a proper church burial to his brother. Then he set up a new shoemaker's shop for himself, finer than the first one, and went back to his trade.

Well, some time went by, and then, one day, a gentleman appeared in Master Joseph's shop, saying he wanted a handsome pair of boots made for

himself. But the so-called gentleman used this excuse to stay in the area and kept visiting the shop. Finally, one day, he took Joseph aside and said to him,

"Master Joseph, let me be frank with you. I find your daughter very attractive, and I would like to marry her."

"How can this be?" replied Joseph. "You are a gentlemen, yet you would marry the daughter of a tradesman, a simple shoemaker?"

"That doesn't matter," the man replied. "I have lost my heart to her, and I simply must have her."

Well, Master Joseph took a little time to let himself be persuaded before he gave his consent. Then, according to custom, the intended groom was invited to make his first visit to the fiancée's house.

Now, this fake gentleman, you realize, was none other than the leader of the robber band. He was saying to himself, "Now I've got you, Master Joseph, and don't you worry about a thing. I'm simply going to plunder your house and kill your whole family!"

And what do you think was his plan? He had all his men arm themselves to the teeth, and then he sneaked them into his fiancée's house where they hid in the pantry behind the large wine casks.

"Stay hidden right here, my boys," he told them, "and I'll come back tonight and give you a signal. When I tap on the wine casks, you'll all come out, and we'll plunder the house and make mincemeat of the owners."

That evening, when it grew dark, the fake gentleman went upstairs to visit the fiancée in her room. They passed the time pleasantly talking and laughing among themselves, but the evening was getting on, and the gentleman made no mention of leaving. So Master Joseph took his daughter aside and said, "I have an idea. Why don't you set the table, bring out a bottle of wine, and we can invite your fiancé to have supper with us tonight."

So his daughter set the table, and then took a lantern to go down into the pantry for the wine. When the robbers heard her enter, they thought it was their leader and said, "Is it time yet, chief?"

The young maiden was startled, and without answering, she ran back upstairs to her father and told him what had happened. Master Joseph was no fool and quickly put two and two together. "Don't be afraid," he told her, "and say nothing to this man. I'm going out, and I'll be back soon."

Well, Master Joseph ran straight to the barracks of the local militia and cried out, "Come quickly, all of you! I've got the band of outlaws caught inside my house!"

To be sure, the soldiers came running, searched his house, seized all the robbers, and hauled them off in chains. The next day they were all executed.

Now Master Joseph was free of the robbers at last. And the fake gentleman, who tried to outsmart him, was completely outsmarted.

*Told by the fisherman Guido Guardalobene to Giuseppe Patiri in Termini-Imerese. (Pitrè notes that Patiri was the author of a historical novel, Pieruccio Gioeni, published in Palermo in 1872.)*

## 109. DEATH AND HER GODSON

**T**his tale's been told time and again about a husband and wife who had a son, and they had to baptize him. But they didn't know who would be the right person to do it. So time passed, a year, two years, until the boy was six. One day, the Lord sent St. Peter to them to baptize the boy. However, the father wouldn't accept him as godfather because he said St. Peter would take the boy to Paradise right after he baptized him. So St. Peter had to leave, and now St. Joseph came. The father liked him, but only as a friend, not as a godfather. So he chased him away because his son might have to die. Then St. John was sent, and the same thing happened.

Well, who do you think was the last to be sent? It was Death, and they rolled out the red carpet for her.<sup>153</sup>

"Now this is the way it should be," the father said. "Since you're the godmother, you can't take away my son, and he'll live until an old age."

So they had the son baptized.

But the next day Death talked about taking away their son. Just imagine how the father felt! However, he continued to act friendly to her and stay on her good side. Then Death showed the father some burning lights. One had enough oil, the other a little, and the last light was about to go out.

"Since this last light is your son's, my friend," Death said, "the time has come because the oil is about finished."

And after saying this, Death left with their son because she never shows preference to anyone.

*Collected in Palermo.*

<sup>153</sup> In Sicily, Death is always represented as an old woman.

## 110. THE COMPANION OF ST. JOHN

Once upon a time there was a husband and wife, and they had a good friend dedicated to St. John.<sup>154</sup> They were all companions. It so happened that the husband was arrested one day and taken to prison. Meanwhile, since the friend was fond of the wife, he made frequent visits to see her. One day, she said to him, “Friend, would you like to come with me and visit my husband?”

“Of course, my friend,” he responded, and they departed.

Along the way they bought a large melon—for it was melon season—to take to the poor prisoner. But we are made of flesh and blood. . . . Well, the friend and the wife offended St. John along the way. . . . In short, they made a big mistake, and St. John was not going to let them get away with it. After they had arrived at the prison and visited the prisoner, they wanted to give a gift to the prison guard before leaving, and they gave him the melon. The guard split it open before their eyes. But what a frightening sight! There was a head in the middle of the melon. Indeed, it was the head of St. John, who had slipped it in there to remind the wife and the friend of their sin.

The police immediately knew what had happened, and they arrested the two companions who confessed to the wrong that they had done. Soon after the prisoner was released while the companions were sent to the gallows.

*Collected in Palermo.*

## 111. THE BAKER’S APPRENTICE

Once there was a baker, and every morning he loaded a loaf of bread on a horse that came to his shop. One day he said, “I’ve been giving a loaf of bread to this horse for some time, and it’s never given me an account or explanation of what happens to the bread.” Then he turned to his apprentice and continued, “Vincenzo, tomorrow after I give the horse some bread, you’re to follow it and see where it goes.”

The next day the horse came, and the baker gave it a loaf of bread. He also

<sup>154</sup> Pitre uses the phrase “*avevanu un cumpari San Giuvanni*,” which literally means a companion of St. John. However, *cumpari* (*compare*) can be a godfather or a companion, good friend, comrade, or buddy. In this case it indicates either a good friend or companion dedicated to St. John.

gave a piece of bread to his apprentice. So, Vincenzo followed the horse, but when he came to a river of milk, he began to eat the bread with some milk. Afterward he couldn't catch up to the horse. So, he turned around and went back to his master. When his master saw him come back without anything, he said, "Tomorrow the horse will return, and if you can't tell me where he goes, I no longer want you as my apprentice."

The next day the horse came, and the baker gave it a loaf of bread and a piece of bread to Vincenzo. When the horse left, Vincenzo began following it. This time he came across a river of wine, and he began to eat the bread with the wine while the horse continued on its way. Once again he returned to his master pulling out his hair for having lost sight of the horse.

"Listen," his master said to him. "The first time one pardons, the second time one condones, and the third time one gives a beating. If you don't succeed in following the horse tomorrow, I'll give you a good beating and send you home."

What was poor Vincenzo to do? The next day the horse arrived, and the baker gave the horse a loaf and his apprentice some bread. Now Vincenzo followed it with his eyes open. Soon the horse came to a river of oil, and Vincenzo said to himself, "What am I going to do? Now the horse will get away from me!"

So he took the reins of the horse, tied them around his waist, and began to eat the bread and oil. The horse pulled, but he said, "First let me finish eating the bread, then I'll come."

When he had eaten up all the bread, he began to follow the horse. They walked and walked until they came to a cattle farm where there was an abundance of tall grass, and the cows were so thin that they could barely stand on their feet. Vincenzo was astonished to see the grass so tall and the cows so thin. Well, he kept walking behind the horse until he came upon another farm where he saw that the grass was thin and short, while the cows were incredibly fat. Then he said to himself, "Just think! Where the grass was tall, the cows were thin, and where there's hardly any grass, the cows are fat!"

Meanwhile the horse kept walking, and Vincenzo followed. They walked and walked until they came across a pig with its tail all in knots, and he was astounded at seeing such a tail. Then they arrived at a water trough where he saw a toad trying to reach a piece of bread in vain. Vincenzo kept walking and reached a gate. The horse knocked it open with its head, and a beautiful lady appeared who said she was the Madonna. When she saw the young man, she said, "What are you doing here?"

So Vincenzo explained: "This horse always comes to my master's shop, and

he gives it a loaf. But he has never been able to find out what happens to the bread that the horse takes.”

“Well then, enter,” the lady said to him, “and I’ll now show you where the horse carries the bread.”

And the lady began to call all the souls of Purgatory.

“My children, come here!”

Then the souls descended, and she gave some of them crumbs, some of them chunks, and to others pieces, and the bread was soon finished. After the bread had disappeared, the lady said to Vincenzo, “Did you see anything along your way here?”

“Yes, my lady,” he responded. “The first day that my master sent me to find out where the horse was going, I saw a river of milk.”

“My boy,” the lady answered, “that was the milk I gave to my son.”

“The second day I saw a river of wine.”

“That was the wine used to consecrate my son,” she responded.

“The third day I saw a river of oil.”

“That was the oil that people ask of me and my son,” she said. “And what other things did you see on the third day?”

“I saw a cattle farm,” Vincenzo replied. “The grass was very tall, and the cows were very thin. Then I saw another farm where the grass was short and dry, and the cows were nice and large.”

“My boy, these cows are the rich people who are in the midst of wealth. It doesn’t matter how much they eat, for they will always remain lean. The cows that you saw are fat because my son takes care of them, and they get fat. But tell me, what else did you see?”

“I saw a pig with its tail all knotted up.”

“Those are people, my boy,” she said, “who pretend that they say their rosaries but do not pray to me or my son. So, my son knots them up.”

“I also saw a toad at a water trough. It was reaching for a piece of bread but couldn’t get it.”

“This is because a poor person asked for a piece of bread from a woman,” she said. “But this woman slapped his hand so hard that she made the poor person drop it. And now the woman is condemned to wander about and ask for a piece of bread. So, what else did you see, my boy?”

“Nothing, my lady.”

“Well then, come with me because I want to show you something else.”

She took him by the hand and led him to Hell. When poor Vincenzo entered, he was frightened by the noise of the chains and the darkness, and he felt like he was dying and wanted to flee.

“You see,” the lady said, “those people who are in chains and crying are

those who are in mortal sin. Now walk with me, and I'll take you to Purgatory."

She took him by the hand and led him to Purgatory, but he didn't hear or see anything because it was so dark. Vincenzo wanted to leave because he felt suffocated.

"Now," the lady said, "I shall bring you to the church of the Holy Fathers. Do you see it, my boy? This is the church of the Holy Fathers. It used to be full, and now it is empty.—Walk along, and I'll take you to Limbo.—Do you see those little ones? Those are the infants who died without being baptized."

The lady wanted to take him to Paradise, but he was too confused. So, she showed him Paradise through a window.

"Do you see that grand palace? There are three seats inside, one for you, one for your master, and one for your mistress."

Afterward she took him to the gate, but the horse was no longer there.

"How am I going to find my way back now?" Vincenzo asked. "I know. I'll follow the tracks of the horse, and I'll find my way back."

"Close your eyes!" the lady responded.

Vincenzo closed his eyes, and all at once he found himself in front of the door to the baker's shop. When he entered, he told his master and mistress what had happened to him. When he finished telling them everything, all three died and went to Paradise.

Now they are happy and content

While we, poor beggars, are discontent.

*Told by Angela Smiraglia in Capaci.*

## 112. THE POOR YOUNG MAN

Once, when a poor young man was wandering about the world, he was struck by the idea of making his way to Heaven.

"I think I'll have to walk a great deal before I reach Heaven," he said. "So now I'll go to a priest and ask for confession, but I won't leave him until he shows me the way to Heaven."

So he entered a church, saw a priest, and called out to him.

"What do you want?" asked the priest who went over to him.

"I'd like you to hear my confession," the young man responded.

"All right, I'll hear your confession. Follow me," the priest said.

After they went to the confessional booth, the priest sat down and told the

young man to cross himself. Upon doing this, he said, "Father, I haven't come to confess."

"Well, then, why have you come? Isn't that why you called?" the priest responded.

"I've come to you," said the young man said, "so that you'll show me the way to Heaven."

When he heard this, the priest looked at him and said, "And didn't I say I was ready to hear your confession?"

In response the poor youth said, "I haven't come to confess but to learn the way to Heaven."

"In short, you've come this morning to drive me crazy! I've had it and I'm going to leave!"

"No, sir!" the poor young man replied. "I won't let you go until you teach me the way to Heaven."

Since the priest realized that he couldn't get rid of him, he said, "Well then, if you want to go there directly on foot, listen to what you have to do. There are two ways: one wide and the other narrow. You have to take the narrow path, but do you know what this path is like? You can't deviate from it and must follow it step by step. Don't dare to widen your pace or to take the wide path, otherwise you'll find yourself in Hell!"

The poor fellow bowed with respect and contentment, took his leave, and went on his way. When he arrived at his home, he took a little sack, put a quarter of bread and a carton of wine inside it, and departed. As he was walking, he felt himself becoming weak. So he ate some bread and sipped some wine and kept going, always keeping his feet on the narrow path. When he reached another village, he heard a band, music, and singing, and he was thoroughly delighted. Now he believed that he had already found heaven, and was happy to have arrived. After entering the church where they were celebrating the festival of the crucifixion, he went and knelt down on the footboard in front of the altar to worship the Lord. As the celebration came to an end, the people departed, and he was left there alone. Then a monk came to close the church, and when he saw the young man kneeling in front of the altar, he said, "Well, what are you doing there? Don't you realize that the celebration is over? It's time for you to leave."

"Oh," responded the poor young man, "you make me laugh when you say something like that. I had to travel a long time to reach Heaven, and now you want to send me away?"

"But I have orders," replied the monk, "to close the building because the monks have to eat."

"I don't want anything. I don't want to eat what's yours. For me, I'm just happy to be here and to have found Heaven."

"Well then," the monk responded, "I'm going to the father superior, and I'll tell him that you refuse to leave!"

So, the poor young man continued to worship while the monk went to the father superior, who told him to leave the young fellow alone. When dinner time arrived, the father superior ordered the monk to bring the poor young man something to eat. So the brother took him some minestrone and told him that the father superior had sent it to him.

"I don't need anything," the youth responded and saw that the little sack that he had in the corner which had previously been empty was now completely full with warm bread that smelled like Heaven because the Lord had provided it.

"I can't return this food to the father superior," the monk said, "otherwise he'll feel offended, and he'll treat me badly."

"All right, then," the poor young fellow replied, "place the food on the altar."

The monk did as he was told and left, but he remained at the door to see what would happen. When the poor young man saw that he was alone and did not have to worry that anyone would care what he did, he began looking at the Lord straight into his eyes and said, "Lord, who was it who put you on the cross?"

And the Lord responded, "Your sins did it!"

"And who put the crown of thorns on your head?"

Again the Lord responded, "Your sins did it!"

The young man burst into tears and asked the Lord who had nailed and tied him up there, and the Lord continued to reply with the same words.

When the poor fellow saw that the Lord always said the same thing, he promised Jesus in tears that, now that he had come this way on foot and found Heaven, he would never sin again.

"I'll never commit any more sins," he said.

The monk, who heard all of this at the door, was astounded by this strange incident. Meanwhile, the poor youth said to the Lord, "Now that I've promised you not to sin, you must get down and eat this plate of minestrone with me."

The Lord told him that he'd be pleased to do so, and he descended the cross, sat down, and began to eat with the poor young fellow, who took out the bread and the wine that the Lord had provided. After they had eaten, the Lord said, "Listen, why don't you come to Heaven with me? All you have to do is to carry out the command that I'll give you: You must say to the monks

that they are all damned, and that they'll have to go to Hell because they have robbed the blood of the poor. I shall only pardon them when they take all the things of the monastery and give them to the poor! . . . If they are willing to do this, listen to what they have to do: you must come here with all of them. Then you will take confession from me, and after this I'll give confession to everyone. Finally there will be communion for everyone. At the end of the communion, everyone will die, and you'll all go and see the glory of holy Heaven."

The monk, who was still watching from behind the door, turned pale when he heard these words, and he ran to tell everything to the father superior. In turn, the father superior didn't believe the monk even after he told his story twice. But the third time that the monk told him that the Lord had descended the cross and had eaten with the young man, he finally believed him and said to the monk, "Go tell that young fellow to come up here so that I can hear the story from his own lips and be fully persuaded."

The monk, who was a good man, went immediately to summon the poor young man, who, in obedience with the Lord's command, followed the monk. When the father superior saw him, he said, "What is all this that the monk has told me? What happened? I won't believe it until I hear it from you?"

"Well, father, what is it you need to hear? All I know is that you are damned, and the Lord told me that, if you don't give everything to the poor, you'll go to Hell!"

"Never," responded the Father Superior. "We don't want to go to Hell. We'll be happy to give everything to the poor if that will get us all to Heaven! Now let us ring the bells and summon all the poor to the church."

So the bells sounded, and the monks gave all their things to the poor. And they even left the buildings to all the poor in perpetual legacy. After everything had been done, the poor young fellow saw that the Lord was waiting in the confessional booth. So he was the first to enter and give his confession. Then the father superior offered his confession, and he was followed by the monks. All of them received absolution.

At the end they all got ready, and the Lord came out and gave them communion. As they received communion one by one, they disappeared and went to Heaven. When the communion was finished, the Lord disappeared and went there too. And then the people who were in the church, as well as those who heard the story told, all became converts and died in the grace of God.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 113. THE HOLY HERMIT

**H**ere's a beautiful story that's been told again and again. Once upon a time there was a hermit who lived in the woods and went every day to fetch water from a well. One day, as he was returning home with his water, he met a prince, who was a demon in disguise. Since it was turning dark, this prince asked if he could come in.

"Oh, good hermit," he said, "could you offer me a bed for the night?"

(Notice that he omitted invoking the name of the Lord, because that would have made him disappear.<sup>155</sup>)

"Come in," answered the hermit. "Although I have no bed to offer you, we'll find a way to make do, even if the space is tight."

That night, the prince took out all kinds of good things to eat—bread, ricotta cheese, and cutlets—but the hermit refused to accept any of it, since he was used to living on grass and water. The next day, the prince left the hermit his horse and his saddlebags containing all his possessions, offering the false excuse that he was leaving them for only three days.

"I have to leave now," he said, "but in three days I'll return to collect these things."

After the three days went by, the horse began to whinny, "Hi, hi, hin!"

"Oh, the poor horse," said the hermit. "It's been three days now that his master hasn't returned, and he must be dying of hunger!"

So he went outside to see what had been left in the saddlebags. Searching inside them, he found a hat, a suit of clothing, a razor, a mirror, soap, shirts, and even a pair of shoes all polished and ready to wear, and lots of money. After he picked up the mirror and looked at himself, he exclaimed, "Ah, how terrible I look with this ugly beard!"

So he picked up the razor, shaved off his beard, put on the fine clothing, mounted the horse, and started down the road. "Keep quiet, little horse," he said, "and at the first village we reach, you'll have all you want to eat and drink."

As they approached the village of Vallelunga, where there is a shrine to the "Madonna of the Sinners,"<sup>156</sup> the horse began to whinny again, "Hi, hi, hin!" He was pleased that affairs were going just as planned, because this horse, you

155 This is the narrator's parenthesis in the original text. Pitre explains that one never approaches a hermit without a greeting invoking God or Jesus and Mary.

156 This refers to a little church at the entrance to the village. The narrator, from Vallelunga, finds it natural to add this familiar detail as a meaningful part of her world.

should know, was another devil in disguise. When they were near the Madonna's shrine, an innkeeper heard the horse's whinny and came to his front door.

"Oh, my!" he exclaimed, "What an elegant prince is coming! Come, wife, and look at this prince!"

The prince (really the hermit, who now looked like a prince) arrived, dismounted, and called to the innkeeper, "Come quick and take care of my horse, who is famished. He needs food and drink immediately!"

After he gave the innkeeper five coins for the care of the horse, he asked, "What can you serve me for dinner?"

"Whatever you wish, good sir."


So he sat down to dinner and gave two coins as a tip to the man who served him. Then it grew late, and he went to bed. The bed was well made, and the linen was of the finest. When it was the middle of the night, all the demons of Hell suddenly swooped down, seized the hermit, together with the tables, the bed, and the entire contents of the room, and swept them all away, leaving the room completely empty.

Now we can leave the hermit, who is cooling his heels in the house of the Devil, and go back to the innkeeper. When the morning had passed, he was surprised not to hear the prince getting up. He waited till midday, and still there was no sign of the prince. He waited a bit longer and then went and opened the bedroom door. And what do you think he found?! That room was as black as pitch. And he came away believing that the grand prince had really been the "Old Adversary" himself."<sup>157</sup>

Just think, a hundred years spent as a hermit, and it takes one minute to end up in the Devil's house!

*Told by Elisabetta Sanfratello in Vallelunga.*

## 114. THE BETRAYAL

nce upon a time there was a chaplain, who was preparing to say the morning mass, the one we call the Paternoster. The sacristan joined him, and together they went to the church to ring the bell for mass. But as soon as they were inside the building, the sacristan noticed a little girl in the middle of the church, all bundled up in an apron and a shawl, and he

<sup>157</sup> The original says *lu virsèriu*, "the adversary," an indirect way of referring to the devil.

pointed her out to his companion. As soon as the chaplain had finished saying his prayers, he told the sacristan, "Before we leave, let's pick up that child and baptize her."

And so they did, and gave her the name Maria. The chaplain carried her off to his house, all bundled as she was, and hired a nanny to feed her. As she grew older, he was able to dismiss the nanny and care for her himself. She grew into a fine young maiden, and when she was ready for marriage, the chaplain arranged for her to marry the king's son. In gratitude, the prince took the chaplain into his household to live with them, and eventually inherited the throne. In time, the young queen became pregnant and gave birth to a handsome baby boy.

Now we must add that their palace had a chapel, and it was there that the chaplain was supposed to say mass. When it was time for mass, he sent for the queen, saying that he was ready to perform the service. She sent back word that she still needed some time to get the baby properly set up in his cradle. Soon the chaplain sent word again, and she replied, "I'm coming." But another half hour passed, and no sign of her. The chaplain sent the king's valet with a third request, and she gave this man a rude reply, which offended him deeply. To get back at her, as soon as the queen left the room to get dressed for mass, the valet took a small knife from his pocket, reached into the crib, and slit the baby's throat.

The queen finally left her room and went to mass, and after a while she sent her maid to check on the child. When the maid noticed that he was silent and was lying deep in his crib, she took a close look, gave him a shake, and discovered that he had no head. She ran at once to the princess, crying that her son's head had been cut off. We have to add here that when the servant killed the child, he cleverly hid the knife inside a pocket of his mistress's housecoat, which she had left on the bed canopy. Now the king took charge of the situation and ordered that everyone be searched to see if the murder weapon could be found. The queen, because she was weeping profusely, had changed out of her good dress and back into her housecoat. And so, when it came time to search her, everyone was astonished to see the knife in the pocket of her coat, and it was all covered with fresh blood.

When the king saw this, he said, "I order you to leave my palace forever, and take the dead child with you!"

The poor queen pleaded that she was innocent and had no idea how this had happened, but everyone shouted at once and said that she was the guilty one. The king was insistent, and she had no choice but to obey his order. She took the body of her son, together with the head, and left the palace.

After she had walked some distance, she found herself in the woods. Continuing on, she encountered a kindly woman, who asked,

“What’s troubling you?”

“You can see what my troubles are,” she replied, weeping and showing her the baby. “They have murdered my son, and they all claim that I’m the one who did it.”

“Be calm,” the woman said, “and have no fear. God always supports the just, and he will reveal your innocence.”

Now this kindly woman was none other than the Blessed Mother herself. She looked closely at the child and then touched him with her finger so that his head was once more attached to his neck. All that remained was a small stripe, like a thin ribbon, to show where the head had been re-attached. Then she said,

“Don’t you see that he’s only sleeping? There’s nothing wrong with your child. Just give him a little shake, and you’ll see!”

When the queen shook her child, she could see that he was healthy and gave a little laugh. Then the Blessed Mother said, “Put him down on the ground and let’s see him walk.”

And when the queen did this, the little boy began to walk and to play.

Now we can leave them there and return to the king, who was dying because of the grief he felt over his little boy and his wife. To revive his spirits, some men from his court, including his valet, took him to the woods to hunt. The Blessed Mother made sure he came to the very place where his wife and child were, but she had the woman hide and took her clothes to wear. Then she made her face look like the young queen’s face, and thus was able to appear exactly like her. When the king and his men saw her, they were sure she was the queen. One of the men approached her and said,

“Is this where your highness has come?”

“This is where I am,” she answered.

“And is this the child?”

“Oh,” she replied, “concerning this child, there is a little sermon I need to preach to you.”

This statement annoyed the king’s valet, who answered, “Don’t you think we’ve heard plenty of sermons before now?”

But the Madonna turned to the little child and said, “Go quickly now, and find the one who is your father!”

And the boy ran up to his father and embraced him. Then she said, “And now come and tell us who murdered you.”

“This is the one who murdered me,” he said, pointing to the valet.


“Do you all see now,” said the Madonna, resuming the appearance of a

stranger, “how innocence wins in the end? Your wife never committed any crime, and it was I who put the child’s head back so that you could all witness God’s omnipotence.”

Then the Blessed Mother had the king’s wife come out from hiding and made peace between them all. She didn’t forget that the valet deserved to be punished and rebuked him strongly. His penalty was banishment from the royal house. Then the king and queen looked around for the stranger, but she had vanished without a trace. They were wonderstruck at what had happened, but went away with their happiness restored, and they loved one another until the end of their days.

*Collected in Polizzi-Generosa by Vincenzo Gialongo.*

## 115. ST. JOSEPH

nce there were three sisters, all of them weavers. The youngest did so much weaving that she wore a hole in the floor, and then out of curiosity, she bent down to see what was there. What she saw was a small table covered with money. She said to her sisters, “Tie a cord to me, so I can get the money.”

So they tied a cord around her waist and lowered her down. When she had gathered as much money as her apron could hold, she said, “Haul me up!” and they did.

Now that they had money, the sisters celebrated by buying all kinds of good things to eat. But they soon ran out of money and had to resort to the same plan. They sent the youngest sister down again, and she came back with more money.

I must tell you that the sisters were not the owners of this house. It belonged to a band of seven robbers, who had been storing their money there. When they returned and found the money missing, they shouted, “We’ve been tricked!” They hadn’t noticed the first time some money had been taken, because they weren’t sure they had counted it accurately. But now they were as angry as hornets. So they held a meeting and said, “All right, from now on only six of us go out, and the seventh stays behind to watch.”

Soon the sisters had run out of money again, and their only thought was to send the youngest down to get some more. So they lowered her as before, but as she was gathering it, the robber came out from his hiding place and said, “So you’ve found the hiding place! And it’s you who’s been taking our money! You’d better come with me.”

Meanwhile, her sisters were still waiting for her, and when she didn't reappear, they assumed she was taking her time gathering a great deal of money. However, the rest of the robber band had joined their companion, and they all went to the forest with their prisoner. They put her inside a cauldron and went looking for wood to start a fire. The poor young maiden could do nothing but cry out, "Oh, help me! Please, somebody!"

An old man happened to be passing, with two small chests loaded on his donkey, and so she called again, "Help! Help!"

Upon hearing her, the old man came to her aid, using his small knife to cut her bonds. Seeing that her life was in danger, he decided to hide her inside one of the chests, which were filled with cotton, and he gave her the following advice. "If the robbers come after me and try piercing the chest, you mustn't make a sound. And when they run a sword through it, you must wipe it clean with the cotton, and under no circumstances allow any blood to show on it. If they see blood, they'll kill you and me both!"

Soon after, the robbers returned and saw that the maiden was gone.

"Who could have taken her?" they asked themselves. "It might have been that old man we saw passing." So they quickly went after him, and called, "You there, old fellow! Wait up!"

He stopped and waited as they came up to him and plunged a sword through the chest. The maiden inside wiped it clean with the cotton. When the sword came out clean, the old man claimed to know nothing. Well, once the robbers were satisfied, they let them go.

When the old man was nearing the next village, he stopped, set down his staff, and unloaded the chests. Then his staff broke out in flowers, and on the very spot where he had set the staff, a palace appeared. The old man told the maiden she could come out now, and then he said to her,

"I want you to know that I am St. Joseph. And you must never forget to pray to me, saying the 'Our Father.' Because if you forget me, then I'll forget you, and I'll let you fall into the robbers' hands again. So think of this, and take it all to heart."

"Oh," replied the young maiden, "I could never forget to say the 'Our Father' to you!"

Now it so happened that the palace St. Joseph had created was directly opposite the king's palace. So when morning came, the royal family all looked out their window and said, "Who could have built this new palace here in just one night? Could it have been spirits? Or are our eyes playing a trick on us? Something mysterious is going on here!"

And they kept rubbing their eyes, thinking that perhaps they were still sleeping. But then, at the palace window, a young maiden appeared with her

maid. They all stared at her, and the king found her looks especially pleasing. So he decided to hold a big party, in order to have this young woman as his guest, and invitations were sent. She came in a beautiful costume, wearing a mask, and was the best dressed of all. Indeed, everyone made way for her and said, "Let the lady pass! Make way for her."

The woman remained at the party for quite some time, and then took her leave. The king gave orders to find out where she went, but it was impossible to find her. So the king held parties for three nights in a row, but still he couldn't find out where she went after she left. The next morning, when the king saw her again at her window, he sent word asking for her hand in marriage. Her answer was yes, and a wedding was quickly arranged. The wedding feast was a long one, and at the end of the day, when it was time to go to bed, the young woman forgot to say an "Our Father" to St. Joseph.

Now the saint had to keep his word, and he punished her by allowing the robbers to find out where she was.

When they found her, this is what they did. They first sent an old woman, who put a little piece of paper, with a spell written on it, under the king's pillow as he slept. Then they themselves arrived, seized the young queen, and told her to "Get up!" When she got out of bed, they made her go and get a cauldron, and then firewood and water. Each time she went, she passed the sleeping king and gave him a nudge, trying to wake him up. But the king couldn't feel anything, because the spell kept him in a deep sleep.

Now that the young queen was the robbers' prisoner, she burst into tears and cried out, "What more will you do to me?"

They told her to get a pair of scissors, so that they could cut off her hair. When she went into another room to get them, she got down on her knees to pray, saying an "Our Father" to St. Joseph. The saint was moved by her prayer, saw her dilemma, and came down to her.

"Because you forgot me," he said, "I forgot *you*. Since you failed to say the 'Our Father' to me, I let you fall into the robbers' hands again. But now just do as I tell you. Take off your clothes and give them to me."

Then St. Joseph dressed himself as the young queen, took on her appearance, and went back to the robbers and said, "Here are the scissors you wanted. Go ahead and cut my hair."

Now the cauldron was coming to a boil, and St. Joseph said, "I know that you intend to put me into the cauldron. But if I can ask for one favor before I die, I'd like all seven of you to blow on the fire."

So they all leaned forward to blow on the fire, and St. Joseph overturned the cauldron with the boiling water all over them, and they were scalded to death. Then he went to find the queen in her room, gave her back her clothes,

and said, "I've rid you of the robbers. I poured the boiling water over them, and they are all dead. Now you must go back to the king and wake him up by removing the little piece of paper from under his pillow. It was an old woman who put this paper there. I'll show you who she is, and then you'll summon her and make her carry away all these dead bodies. But when you come to the last dead body, as you sew up its burial clothes, sew her to the corpse, so that she'll be dragged into the grave along with the corpse!"

And then St. Joseph departed, leaving his last word with the queen.

"Don't ever forget me, otherwise I'll forget you again."

"I can never forget you," she answered, "because I'm so grateful for all the help you gave me."

They said their goodbyes, and the queen immediately went to remove the piece of paper from under the king's pillow. He awoke, dazed and surprised, and she recounted all that had happened. The king's admiration for St. Joseph knew no bounds, and from then on they kept him as their protector, their advocate, and their patron saint.

*Collected in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 116. THE ARCHANGEL ST. MICHAEL AND HIS DEVOTEE

There's a tale that's been often told about a husband and a wife who had a little son, and they were very devoted to the Archangel St. Michael. Every year they always held a feast in his honor. In the meantime, the father died, and whenever the holiday of St. Michael was celebrated, the mother did what she could. But there came a time when she had nothing more to offer and wasn't going to be able to observe the holiday of St. Michael. But as the holiday approached, she thought of a good solution.

"I'll go to the king," she said to herself, "and I'll sell my son and use the money to observe the holiday."

So she went to the king and said, "Do you want to buy my little son? Even for twelve gold coins. Whatever you give me, I'll take, just so that I have enough to observe St. Michael's Day."

The king took her son and gave her a hundred gold coins. The woman left her son there and departed. Since the king had a little daughter, he brought the two children together to play with one another. The king's daughter had a gold apple and the two of them rolled it about.

But let's leave them playing and turn to the mother. In the meantime, she was able to celebrate St. Michael's Day, and the king remarked, "Well now, that woman has just sold her son so she could have enough money to observe St. Michael's Day, and I'm not even offering him anything."

Immediately he called his artisans and ordered them to build a chapel. Then he bought a statue of the Archangel St. Michael and honored him with a celebration. After the celebration was over, he put a veil over the statue and never returned to the chapel.

As for the children, they grew nicely day after day. The boy, who was called Peppi, became tall and handsome, and the king's councilors said, "Your majesty, what are you going to do with the boy? You certainly don't want to give him to your daughter as her husband, do you?"

"What can I do?" he said. "Do you think I can send him away?"

"Let him take charge of some merchandise and send him on a trip to do some trading. Then give him a ship in terrible shape, once he reaches the middle of the sea, have your captain abandon him, and he'll surely drown."

The king liked this advice very much and said to Peppi, "I want you to take a trip and trade some merchandise. You have three days to decide what kind of merchandise you want to carry on the ship."

That night, the young man thought about what kind of merchandise he would carry on the ship. After two days he still hadn't decided anything. The last night he thought and thought, and finally he called on the Archangel St. Michael for help. All at once St. Michael appeared and said to him, "Don't be discouraged. Tell the king that you want to load the ship with salt."

The next day, Peppi got up and was very happy. He went to the king who asked, "Peppi, what have you decided?"

"Your majesty," he responded. "I'm going to load the ship with salt."

All the councilors liked the idea and told the king, "This way the ship will sink even faster."

Once the ship was loaded with salt, Peppi took his leave from everyone and departed. The captain unfurled the sails, and they began to sail away. When they arrived at a spot that the captain considered just right for his task, he left Peppi alone at sea on the leaky ship, and he and his men boarded another ship that had followed them. As soon as Peppi saw this leaky ship take in more water, he began to shout, "'Oh, heavenly mother! St. Michael! Oh Lord! Help me!"

All of a sudden the Archangel St. Michael appeared on a ship made completely of gold. So now Peppi sailed on this ship to the country that St. Michael told him was their destination. When the inhabitants of this country saw the ship, they went to see if it was coming to make peace or war. When

they called out and asked Peppi, he replied, "I'm coming to make peace, not war."

The king invited Peppi and his gentleman companion (for the king did not know that it was St. Michael) to dine with him. They went to eat with this king, and in their pockets they carried salt in little packets because St. Michael knew that these people didn't use salt. When they sat down at the table, Peppi and St. Michael began to eat the food, but it tasted like straw. So, they said, "Why don't you eat the food with salt?"

"What do you mean?"

St. Michael turned to Peppi and said, "Take out the little packet."

Peppi took a little salt and put it on the food. Then he mixed the salt into the food and said to the king, "Your majesty, do you want to taste the food?"

"That's delicious! Do you have a lot of this stuff?"

"We have a whole ship full."

"What does it cost?"

"It's worth its weight in gold."

"Well then, I'll buy it all," the king said.

When they finished eating, they unloaded the salt and weighed it. On one side of the scale they placed the salt, and on the other side, the gold. After the king took the salt, Peppi began to load his ship with gold. Then he and St. Michael took their leave and returned to the city where Peppi lived.

Let's leave them sailing on the sea, and turn to the king's daughter, who was constantly on her balcony looking out toward the sea and waiting for Peppi to return. When the ship approached, the Archangel St. Michael disappeared along with the gold ship. In its place he made the leaky ship reappear. When the princess saw this ship, she was very happy.

"Papa!" she cried out. "Peppi's coming! Papa, Peppi's coming!"

After he landed, Peppi went to the palace where he kissed the king's hand and told him to send some men to unload the ship. The king immediately ordered the ship to be unloaded, and the gold filled an entire room. At noon they sat down to eat and amuse themselves.

After some time passed, the councilors said to the king, "Your majesty, you're aware that we haven't accomplished anything."

"Well, what am I supposed to do?" the king said.

"Send him on another voyage with some merchandise."

So, the king said to Peppi, "Peppi, think about what kind of cargo you want to carry on your next voyage because I'm sending you on another trading trip tomorrow."

That night Peppi couldn't sleep, for he kept thinking about what cargo he should carry. So, he called on St. Michael again, and the archangel appeared.

"Don't be discouraged," the saint said. "I'm here for you. When you need me, just call me. What's the matter now?"

"I must take another trip," he said, "and I'm confused. I don't know what I should take with me."

"Have the ship loaded with cats," St. Michael responded.

When dawn broke the next day, the king asked, "Peppi, have you thought about merchandise you want to trade?"

"I've given it a lot of thought," he replied. "I want you to have the ship loaded with cats."

So the king issued a proclamation, "All people who own cats must bring them to the royal palace." And the king bought the cats from the people. As usual, Peppi had the ship loaded with this cargo, asked permission to leave, and departed. When they arrived at the same spot in the middle of the sea, the captain abandoned him again, and Peppi was about to drown. So, he began to shout for help and called for the Archangel St. Michael, who immediately appeared. He was on the same ship of gold, and they set sail for another city. When the inhabitants of this city saw the gold ship, they quickly sent ambassadors to see if the ship was coming to make peace or war. Peppi and St. Michael told them they were coming in peace, and the king invited them to dine with him. When the time came to eat, they sat down at the table, and next to each plate was a little whisk broom. When Peppi saw this, he asked, "Why have you placed these little whisk brooms here?"

"You'll soon see," said the king.

When they began to eat, a large number of mice appeared, and they climbed on the table and began eating between the plates. The guests used their brushes to brush away the mice. So, St. Michael turned to Peppi and said, "Peppi, go and fetch the sack that we brought with us from the ship."

Peppi got up and fetched the sack that was in the other room, and he let out four cats that attacked the mice and slaughtered them. When the king saw the cats, he said, "Oh, what beautiful little creatures! Do you have many of them?"

"We have a whole boat full of them."

"Are they expensive?"

"They're worth their weight in gold."

When they got up from the table, they went to get the cats and gave them all to the king. He weighed them, and on one side of the scale he put the cats, and on the other, the gold. Once again Peppi filled the ship with gold, and once it was full, they asked permission to leave, set the sails, and departed.

Now let's turn to the king's daughter who was on her balcony and waiting

for Peppi to return. When she looked from her window, she recognized him because he was sailing in the same boat in which he had departed.

"Papa, papa!" she cried out. "Peppi's coming!"

And she began dancing. When Peppi docked at the port, he left the ship and went to the palace. There he kissed the king's hand, and they embraced. Then he kissed the princess and told the king to send some servants to unload the ship. Once again the gold filled an entire room. At noon they sat down at the table and began to eat, and once they were done, they retired to their rooms to rest. But the councilors turned to the king and told him the usual things. Then the king said to them, "Let him rest for a week."

Well, after a week had passed, he said, "Peppi, tomorrow you must take another trip with merchandise."

That night Peppi began to think once more about what kind of merchandise he should take with him, and he called on the Archangel St. Michael, who appeared and said, "Don't be discouraged. This time you're to carry a shipload of beans."

So the next day he filled a ship with beans and took his leave. The captain abandoned him on the deep seas and returned home. Soon, the ship began to sink, and Peppi called on the Archangel St. Michael, who immediately appeared on a gold ship. Then they set sail for another city. When they arrived at the port, the ambassadors of that city immediately went to see if they had come to make peace or war.

"I've come to make peace," Peppi said. "I haven't come to make war."

The ruler of this city was a woman, and she invited them to eat with her at noon. So they went to eat with the queen, and when they were finished, she said, "Do you want to play some cards?"

And so, they all began to play cards and gamble. The queen was an excellent card player, and all the men who came to her palace always lost to her. And after they lost, she would stick them in a dungeon. While they were playing, St. Michael kept producing endless sums of money, but he had lost a lot and told Peppi that the queen was wearing special gloves.

"Take off her gloves."

Peppi took them off her, and they began to play again. Now St. Michael began winning. Indeed, not only did he win back all that he had lost, but he also took a great deal more from the queen, who was about to be ruined. So she declared war against them, and they agreed on the time to meet. She called together all her soldiers, and they marched in perfect order to the battlefield to fight against St. Michael and Peppi who drew their swords. As soon as they began the battle, St. Michael caused a strong gust of wind to arise that caused dust to fly in the eyes of the soldiers and blinded them. Then he cut off the

queen's head, stuck it on the tip of a sword, and went toward the city. When St. Michael and Peppi arrived in the city, the people welcomed them because they could not stand their queen.

"We want you to be our king!" they cried out. "We want you to be our king!"

"I can't be your king," St. Michael replied, "because I am the king of another country."

They put the head in a strong iron cage and hung it up on a street corner. Then St. Michael went with Peppi to the queen's palace. When they arrived, they took the keys and opened the dungeon where they saw many people—stinking, starving, and some even dead. Once they looked at these people, St. Michael said to Peppi, "Go and get a sack of beans."

So Peppi went and fetched a sack of beans and poured the beans into the dungeon. The people gobbled up the beans like pigs. Then St. Michael had some broth made out of the beans to feed them so they could return to their homes. Later St. Michael and Peppi sold the rest of the beans that were worth their weight in gold because beans were unknown in this city. Once the sale was made, they loaded their ship with gold, took some soldiers with them, and said farewell to the inhabitants of the city, and departed.

When they arrived in the bay of Peppi's city, they fired a canon salute. The king returned their salute. Peppina—for that was the name of the king's daughter—was standing on her balcony. When she saw the gold ship appear with a new flag, she went running to her father and cried out, "Papa, Peppi's coming!"

When they arrived in the port, they sent a messenger to ask for men to unload the ship. The king immediately sent some men, and they began to unload the ship with St. Michael and Peppi. Then Peppi left the ship with the soldiers and went to the palace. There, he kissed the king's hand. At noon there was a grand feast. While everyone was at the table and they were eating, St. Michael said to the king, "You have a statue of the Archangel St. Michael. I know you celebrated his holiday one year, and after that you no longer celebrated it. Why is that? Perhaps you don't have enough money?"

"I'm no longer devoted to him," the king responded.

And St. Michael said, "Let's go and look at the statue."

They went to look at it, and it was completely moldy. When the Archangel St. Michael saw it, he said nothing. They went back to the dining room and continued eating. When they were finished, St. Michael said, "I am the Archangel St. Michael, and I want you to have this young couple married at once and to continue observing the holiday of the Archangel St. Michael!"

So, St. Michael presided over the marriage of Peppi and the princess. Then

he blessed them, said farewell, and departed. The next day, after he had gone, they held a great feast, and everyone began throwing wedding sweets.<sup>158</sup> Peppi and Peppina were happy. The king took off his crown and placed it on Peppi's head, and soon after there was a great celebration. So in the end

they loved each other, husband and wife,  
While we are sorry asses and lead a dreary life.

*Told by Calogero Fasulo Leonardo Greco in Salaparuta.*

## 117. POPE GREGORY

Once upon a time there was a brother and sister who were extremely fond of one another. This fondness led to the sister becoming pregnant, and after nine months, when she gave birth to a fine baby boy, they baptized him with the name Gregory. Then they had a little chest made for him, placed him into it with precious objects and swaddling clothes of gold, and ordered the chest to be thrown into the sea. The sea carried it away, and the waves tossed it this way and that until a fisherman finally saw the chest and pulled it out of the water. When he opened it, he exclaimed, "Oh, my poor little child! How can you come with such precious possessions, but no father or mother?"

And he took the child home to his wife, who happened to have just given birth to a child of her own, so she was not very pleased to see this other baby.

"Who in the world gave you this child?" she cried. "I'll have nothing to do with other people's babies!"

"I simply found him in the sea while I was fishing," the husband replied.

"How do I know you're telling me the truth?" she retorted. "Who knows what kind of tricks you're up to, coming to me with this cock-and-bull story?"

Nonetheless, this child was raised together with the fisherman's sons, and he grew by leaps and bounds. Eventually, the fisherman sent him to school with his own sons. But you know what boys are like, and how cruel they can be to one another. One day the fisherman's sons said to Gregory, "Get out of here, you're not really our brother! Our father fished you out of the sea in a chest!"

<sup>158</sup> It was customary in Sicily at this time to celebrate the newly married couple by throwing wedding sweets.

Now Gregory was deeply hurt and went home in tears.

"What's wrong, my son?" the fisherman asked him.

"You have to tell me whether I really am your son or not. My brothers say that I am not really their brother, that you fished me out of the sea in a chest."

"No, my son, they're the ones I fished out of the sea in a chest, not you."

These words from his father calmed the lad, but a few days later his brothers started up again. "Get away from us! You really were found in a chest in the sea. Our father deliberately made up the story that you're his son."

This time Gregory went home and insisted on the truth.

"Father, you have to tell me who my parents really are!"

"My son, since you insist on knowing the true story, here it is. One day I went to the sea and saw a little chest floating there, and I picked it up. When I opened it and looked inside, I found a baby boy surrounded by precious golden objects. I saved the chest and those objects, and the little boy was you. And here are the things you had with you when I found you."

And he went to the place where he was keeping the chest and the swaddling clothes, and showed them to Gregory. The poor lad, when he heard these words, could only reply,

"Father, you must forgive me, but now I have to go find out who my real father and mother are."

And saying this, he took leave of the fisherman and started off on his journey. Not knowing the roads, he had to keep asking which way to go, and eventually he ended up in the same place where his mother lived. He found a job teaching school there, and a young woman happened to be living directly opposite him. It turned out that she was his mother.

When the woman saw young Gregory, she liked his looks very much and said, "What a handsome young fellow! I'd like to make him my husband."

So one day, she invited him to a meal at her house, and she lavished so much attention on him that he fell in love with her. Well, little time passed before they decided to become man and wife. The youth said, "Yes, we should marry at once, because I am alone and need someone to keep house for me."<sup>159</sup>

And so they took their vows and had their wedding. Well, that very evening, the youth's first thought was to bring forth the little chest that the fisherman gave him. So when the two of them had retired to their bedroom, he set

159 Pitrè's note points out that among the lower classes, it was so clearly understood that the wife's role was to provide household service to the husband, that a man typically stated his reason for marriage as the need for a housekeeper. He quotes the proverb, "A mother's love, and a wife's service" (*Amuri di matri, e sirvimentu di mugghieri*).

the chest on top a small table. When the wife—who was really his mother—saw the chest, she burst into tears, saying to herself,

“This young man has to be my son!”

“What’s wrong?” Gregory said. “What’s happened to you? You must tell me!”

But the woman remained speechless. So Gregory ran and called his brother-in-law.

“What’s wrong?” said the woman’s brother, as he entered the room. “Why are you so upset, my sister?”

“Just look at what’s sitting on that table,” she answered.

When the brother-in-law saw the little chest, he too burst into tears and couldn’t stop crying.

“The way the two of you are crying,” said the young man, “makes me wonder what’s going on. You must tell me!”

His brother-in-law controlled himself and replied,

“Do you want to know the truth? You are my sister’s son and mine too. When you were born, we sent you off in this little chest, and now that we’re seeing you again, we can’t help crying over the sin that we committed.”

“There’s no need for you to cry,” replied young Gregory. “I intend to atone for your sin.”

And so saying, he left them and went into the woods, where he found a cave and settled there to do penance.

He spent many years in that cave doing penance, and meanwhile, in Rome, the Pope passed away. The bishops needed to find a new Pope, and they all gathered together in a room to hold a council. It was decided that they would release a dove into the air, and whoever the dove flew to and landed on was to be the new Pope. Well, the dove flew and fluttered all around the room and refused to land on anyone there. So they opened the window to see what the bird would do, and what do you think it did? It flew out the window and straight to the place where Gregory was doing penance. When the dove reached the front of the cave, it landed. The bishops had kept their eye on it, and as soon as they saw it land, they all went to the cave. When the dove saw this gathering of bishops, canons, and cardinals, it spread its wings again and took off into the cave. The bishops were right behind it, and as soon as they entered, they saw that the dove had come to rest on the head of a poor hermit. Then they all got down on bended knees before him and revered him as their new Pope.

Then there was a grand procession back to Rome, and a great celebration was held, and this Pope was given the name “Pope Gregory.”

Once this new Pope was in office, he wrote a letter to his father and mother

saying that he had done so much penance for their sin that he had become Pope. "Your sin," he wrote, "became my good fortune. So give away all your possessions to charity, and come here to Rome, and we can enjoy being reunited as a family."

His father and mother were very happy to receive such a letter. They sold all their possessions and gave the money to charity, and then got on a ship and went to join their son. What joy these two felt to be with their son again! And what joy Pope Gregory felt to have his father and mother together with him again!

So they remained in peace and content,  
While we remain here without a cent.

*Told by Giuseppe Patuano in Palermo.*

## 118. HOLY POPE SYLVESTER

**T**here's a story they like to tell, that once there was a king called Constantine, and although this king was married, he wanted to take a second wife. So he wrote to his Holiness, Pope Sylvester, that he wanted to marry again. Pope Sylvester answered him and stated, "I will not go against God's command."

"You had better do as I ask," Constantine replied, "because if you don't, there will be great trouble for you afterwards."

"You can act as you please," said the Pope, "but I will not give you permission to violate God's command."

Then Constantine sent him a threat: "If you don't act as I tell you, I'll quickly force you to flee from your throne."

At that point, the Pope, afraid of offending God, decided to leave and take refuge in a forest, where he could pray. Well, in that forest there was a church that Jesus Christ had built for him, where he could pray as much as he wanted. Indeed, his prayers were so powerful that Jesus sent leprosy to afflict Constantine, and it was so terrible that the king was totally bedridden and could barely move. He called for help, sending all his servants to summon the doctors, but no one could cure him of this malady. When Constantine was at a point of total despair, he had an important dream, which spoke to him and said, "Neither doctors nor men of science have been able to help you. Your only help will come from Pope Sylvester's refuge."

When he awoke the next morning, he felt happy and summoned all his councilors.

"My councilors," he said, "help me interpret my dream which said that help would come from Pope Sylvester. I wish we could find him, wherever he is."

"This council is concluded," they replied. "It's clear that we must find Pope Sylvester."

"Take as many soldiers as you need," said Constantine, "and don't abandon the search until you've found him."

So the general left with his men and began searching the woods. They soon came upon a small church that resembled a house and saw someone walking around inside.

"What kind of person are you?" asked the general.

"I am a Christian," came the answer.

"Could it be that you are Pope Sylvester?"

"Yes, I am Pope Sylvester. And what does the general wish of me?"

"King Constantine sent me here. He desires your presence in his house, whenever it pleases you."

"If my wish was to please him," answered the Pope, "I would have done so at the beginning."

"Pope Sylvester," said the general, "won't you please do me this favor and come to Constantine's palace?"

"All right, I'll do what you ask," answered the Pope, "but first give me time to finish saying a holy mass."

Then he took three rapeseeds and said, "We'll plant these in the garden, and when mass is finished, we can eat them."

And the general watched as he planted them. Then the Pope made all the soldiers kneel, as he put on his vestments. At that moment an angel of God descended and took part in the mass. The general and his soldiers were frightened by the dazzling spectacle, as the court of Heaven and the Trinity all descended to the altar. At the elevation of the host, the general saw the infant Jesus as God shining within the host, and he said to his men, "How beautiful to see the Lord himself!"

When the chalice was lifted, he saw the very blood of Jesus Christ, who was a Jew and became a Christian. At the conclusion of the mass, the Pope offered thanks to God for changing from Jew to Christian. Then he turned to the general and said,

"Do you wish to be baptized?"

"With all my heart," he replied, "because I want to live under God's law."

So Pope Sylvester baptized him, and he became a Christian and a follower of Catholic law, and the general had all the soldiers baptized as well, to live by

Catholic law. Then the soldiers said, "General, now that we've seen this miracle from God and have become Christians, let us eat."

"All right," said Pope Sylvester. "Let us go now and pick the three rape plants that we sowed."

The general was not ready to believe it, but when they got there, they found it had been accomplished. The three rape plants were fully grown and ready to be picked. The general plucked three seeds from the plants and gave them to the Pope. Then Pope Sylvester began dividing up the seeds among all the soldiers that were there, and they were enough, and the men ate until they were full, and all marveled at what a great miracle God had granted them.

Then the general went to get King Constantine and brought him all wrapped up in a sheet, carrying him in a litter to where the Pope was. When they arrived, Constantine asked for the Pope's pardon, and Sylvester replied,

"How did you expect me to disobey God's command? If I had done that, I wouldn't have been able to perform these miracles."

"And is there no remedy for me?" asked Constantine.

"Yes, a remedy is possible," answered the Pope. "You must be willing to become a Christian and accept Catholic law. If you accept this law, your health will return just as you had it before."

And so Constantine agreed to be baptized by Pope Sylvester. Once he had accepted holy baptism and the Pope had washed him with holy baptismal water, his terrible disease disappeared. Afterwards, King Constantine created a constitution for his people and made a sacred law for them. And the manner of his death is known only to God.

*Collected in Resuttano by Prof. Alfonso Accurso.*

## 119. PILATE

**T**hey say that once upon a time the following event took place in Rome. A small wagon carrying large paving stones was passing through the desolate countryside, and one of its wheels got stuck in a ditch. After much heaving and pulling, the men pried it loose. But it left behind a large hole in the ground, through which they could look down and see a dark underground chamber. One of the men asked,

"Who'd be willing to go down into that hole?"

"I would," answered the wagon driver. And before you knew it, they found a rope and used it to lower the man into that dark place.

Now this wagon driver (let's call him Master Francesco), once he was down there, turned to his right and saw a portal. He opened it and saw a darkness so thick you could cut it with a knife. He turned to his left, and it was just as bad. He went to the wall facing him, and it was no different. Finally, he turned around and opened the portal directly behind him. There he saw a man sitting at a small table, with pen, inkwell, and a sheet of paper that he was reading. As soon as he finished reading it, he would begin all over again, and then still another time, never once lifting his eyes from this sheet of paper. Now, this Master Francesco was a man of exceptional courage, so he approached the man and asked, "Who are you?" But the man refused to answer, and kept on reading. Francesco asked a second time, "Who are you?" But again, no reply. When he asked a third time, the man's only reply was, "Turn around, take off your shirt, and I'll write who I am on your back. When you leave here, go directly to the Pope and ask him to read my name to you. But be careful to let nobody but the Pope read it."

So Master Francesco turned around and took off his shirt, and the man wrote something on his back and sat down again. Now, for all that Francesco was a brave man, he was not made of wood and was crapping in his pants at that moment. When he put his shirt back on, he turned to the man and asked, "How long have you been here in this place?"

But hell would freeze over before the man replied. He just sat there as if nothing had taken place. It was pointless for Francesco to ask one question after another, since he was never going to get an answer.

So, realizing that he was wasting his time, Master Francesco gave a signal to the men holding the rope, and they pulled him back up. The minute they saw him, they were shocked—he was unrecognizable! His hair had gone completely white, and he looked like a ninety-year old man.

"My God!" they exclaimed. "What's happened to you?"

"Nothing," he replied. "Nothing. Just take me to the Pope, because I have something to confess."

Well, two of the men took him directly to the Pope. He told the Pope the whole story, and without further ado he took off his shirt. "Read it, your Holiness," he said, and the Pope read the following words: "I am Pilate."

The minute the Pope pronounced these words, the poor wagon-driver was turned into a statue.

People have said that this was Pilate, condemned to remain forever in that underground room reading the sentence that Jesus Christ pronounced on him, and never able to lift his eyes from that sheet of paper. And so,

This is the story of Pilate the man,  
Who was never saved and never damned.<sup>160</sup>

*Collected by Agatuzza Messia in Palermo.*

## 120. MALCHUS THE DESPERATE

**T**his Malchus was one of the Jews who flagellated our Lord, a terribly ugly Jew, uglier than you can describe. At the time when Jesus was taken to Pilate's house, Malchus took an iron glove and gave Jesus such a vicious blow that it knocked all the teeth from his mouth.

As his punishment for this great sacrilege, the Lord condemned him to a life underground, in which he had to keep walking round and round a column, with no chance of ever stopping to rest. This column was planted firmly in the center of a round chamber, and there Malchus must walk continually around in circles with never a pause or respite. They say that his continuous circling has worn down the earth, so that the column now appears higher than it originally was. Malchus has had no escape from this life ever since the time that Jesus Christ underwent his holy suffering and death.

They claim that the remorse that Malchus feels has put him in a state of utter desperation, and in his circling he keeps whacking the column with his hands, and hitting his head against the wall, and beating himself and lamenting loudly. But despite all this, he can never die, because God's sentence condemns this man to live on until the coming of Judgment Day.

*Told by Francesca Deodato, Giuseppe Pitre's maid, in Palermo.*

## 121. ST. PETER AND THE THIEVES

**T**his tale's been told over and over again about the times when the Lord walked about the world with his apostles, and one time, while he was with them in the countryside, the Lord asked, "Peter, what are we going to do tonight?"

<sup>160</sup> The folk tradition, as Pitre points out, contains many references to Pilate, presenting him as achieving neither salvation nor damnation. See further details in the endnotes.



“Nothing to worry about, my Lord. I saw some shepherds tending their flock down there. Come with me.”

So they hurried down a hill, one after the other, and reached the flock.

“May God be with you, and long live Mary, can you give us shelter for the night? We’re poor pilgrims, tired and starving to death.”

“May God be with you, and long live Mary!” The chief shepherd and his companions responded, but none of them moved. They merely pointed to the haystack where the pilgrims could sleep as they continued rolling out the dough for the pasta on the table. Indeed, they didn’t want to give the thirteen men something to eat because there might not be enough for them. So the poor Lord and his apostles were disgraced, but they held their tongues and went to sleep.

All of a sudden a great number of thieves appeared.

“Get down on your knees! To hell with God and his saints! Nobody can save you now!”<sup>161</sup> And they beat the shepherds on their backs. What a sight! The shepherds ran away as fast as they could. The thieves cleaned out the place and took over the flock, and then they went to the haystack.

“All of you, out! Who are you?”

“We’re thirteen poor pilgrims,” said St. Peter. “We’re tired and hungry because those shepherds treated us worse than dogs without even welcoming us and saying ‘be our guests.’ ”

“Well, if that’s the case, come out! The pasta is still fresh. Fill yourselves with their food because we must flee for our lives.”

Poor men. They were starved like wolves. They did not have to be asked twice and went to eat the food.

“Blessed be the thieves!” St. Peter said, “for they think more about poor starving people than the rich people do.”

“Blessed be the thieves!” the apostles exclaimed, and they filled their bellies with good food.

And they remained happy and content

While we still don’t have a cent.

*Collected by Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

161 The Sicilian is: *Ca santu di ccà e santu di ddà*. Pitrè remarks that this phrase is the most bold blasphemy in Sicily. It is difficult to find a precise literal translation.

## 122. ST. PETER AND THE TAVERN-KEEPER

**O**ne time, so it's been told, Jesus Christ went walking on earth with his apostles to look after the people. When he reached a town, he stopped because he was thirsty from walking so much. During those times the wine was stored in barrels, and the apostles wanted to have the wine of Viola that they liked very much. So Jesus Christ ordered St. Peter to fetch the wine, and he went right away without being asked twice. All the tavern-keepers were deceitful at that time, and when St. Peter entered a tavern, the tavern-keeper wanted to make a fool of him.

"Peter, my friend," he said, "taste this wine, and see how it is. But first eat some of this fennel. I think you'll like the wine better this way."

St. Peter took the fennel and ate it, and then he tasted the wine.

"Hey, my friend, I really like what you've given me!"

Since St. Peter wanted more, the tavern-keeper tapped another barrel of wine and gave it to St. Peter, who lifted it on his back. Then he carried it to his Lord, and when he arrived, he cried out, "Here's the wine, my Lord. I believe I've never drunk better wine than this."

He unloaded the barrel, and the Lord tasted the wine, "Oh, Peter, Peter, you've been tricked."

"Do you really think so, my Lord? Let me taste it again."

After he tasted it, he realized that it was sour wine. Indeed, he didn't know this because he had eaten fennel before drinking the wine.

So the Lord sent another apostle to fetch some good wine. And after this they knew that one should never eat fennel before tasting wine to see if it's good.

*Told by Francesca Deodato, Giuseppe Pitrè's maid, in Palermo.*

## 123. THE LORD, ST. PETER, AND THE APOSTLES

**W**hen the Lord went walking about the world with his thirteen apostles, they reached a village where there was no bread. So the Lord said to them, "Peter, I want each one of you to carry a stone."

So each one of them picked up a stone and carried it, but St. Peter picked up the smallest he could find. All the apostles trudged along carrying their heavy stones, while St. Peter had no trouble at all.

"Now, let's go to another village," the Lord said. "If they have bread there,

we'll buy it. If there is none, I'll give you my blessing, and the stones will become bread."

So they went to another village, put the stones on the ground, and rested. The Lord gave his blessing to all of them, and the stones turned into bread. St. Peter, who had carried a tiny stone, felt his heart grow faint!

"My Lord," he said, "how am I going to manage with such little bread?"

"Well, my brother, why did you carry such a tiny stone? The others who carried heavy stones have enough bread for themselves."

They continued wandering about, and the Lord told them each to carry another stone. This time St. Peter thought he would be smart, and he carried a large stone while all the others picked up tiny stones. Meanwhile, the Lord turned to the apostles and said, "Boys, now we shall have a little fun with St. Peter."

When they reached the next village, the apostles threw away the stones because they had bread there. St. Peter was hunched over because he had carried a large slab much to his dislike.

Soon after this, they continued walking, and a man came toward them, and since St. Peter was ahead of the rest, he said, "The Lord will be here in a moment. Ask him a favor for your soul."

When the Lord approached, the man said, "My Lord, my father is sick and dying because of old age. Please heal him, my Lord."

"Do you think I'm a doctor? Well, I'll tell you what you have to do. Put him into an oven, and your father will become a boy again."

This is indeed what he did, and his father became a little boy.

This idea pleased St. Peter, and later, when he was alone, he went around and tried to make some old men young again. Just at that time he happened to meet a man who was looking for the Lord because his mother was about to die, and he wanted the Lord to heal her.

"Who are you looking for?" St. Peter asked.

"I'm looking for the Lord because my mother is old and gravely ill, and only the Lord can cure her."

"You're in luck, for St. Peter is here! You know what you have to do? Heat your oven, stick your mother inside, and she will be healed."

The poor man believed him because he knew that the Lord loved St. Peter very much. So he went home and immediately stuck his mother in a hot oven. What more do you want? The old woman turned into a piece of coal.

"Ah! He's the scum of the earth!" the son exclaimed. "That scabby man made me kill my mother!"

So he turned around and went looking for St. Peter, who happened to be

with the Lord. When the Lord heard what had happened, he burst out laughing and said, “Ah, Peter, what have you done?”

St. Peter tried to excuse himself, but the poor son kept cursing him and said he wanted his mother because he loved his mother. So, what did the Lord do? Well, he went to the house of the dead woman, and he blessed her so that the old woman’s life was restored, and she became a beautiful young girl. This was the way the Lord brought relief to St. Peter, who felt tormented by the entire situation.

*Told by a certain Gargano in Bagheria.*

## 124. MOTIVE<sup>162</sup>

Once upon a time there was a father and a mother who had a little son. They died, and the boy was abandoned. Some neighbors took pity on him, gave him something to eat, and looked after him. The boy grew every day by leaps and bounds, and when he was older, the people said to him, “Now, you’re to go out into the world, Motive (for that was what the boy was called). You’re a young man now, and it’s time you thought about earning a living and taking a burden off our shoulders.”

Motive got himself ready, and after he made a bundle of clothes, he departed and walked and walked until he was reduced to nothing and dying of hunger. One day, he saw an inn, and after he entered, he said to the innkeeper, “Would you like to hire me as your assistant? I don’t want anything more than a piece of bread for my salary.”

The innkeeper, who was married, spoke to his wife.

“What do you say, Rosina? We don’t have any children . . . Should we hire this young man?”

“Yes,” she said, and they hired him.

Motive was more mindful and attentive than any man could be. He performed any kind of work that the innkeeper and his wife asked of him. And he liked his master and mistress very much. Indeed, they developed a great love for him, and he became like a son to them. So, one day they went to a notary and legally adopted him.

Time passed, and the innkeeper and his wife reached old age. Soon the

162 The title in Sicilian is “Accaciùni”, also *Caciùni*, which means motive, cause, or reason. It is used in this tale as a person’s name to make a proverbial point.

innkeeper died, and then his wife, and they bequeathed the inn and all their possessions to Motive. As soon as he was in charge of all this wealth, he made a sign in front of the inn:

“Whoever Enters Motive’s Inn Eats Free of Charge.”

Just imagine the people who came!

Well, one time the Lord and his apostles happened to pass through this village. When St. Thomas read this sign, he said,

“My Lord, until I see it with my own eyes and feel it with my own hands, I won’t believe it. So, let’s go to the inn.”

No sooner said than done. Jesus Christ and his apostles entered, ate, and drank, and Motive treated them like fine lords. Then, before they left, St. Thomas said, “Motive, why don’t you ask a favor of our Lord?”

So, Motive turned to the Lord and said, “My Lord, I have a fig tree in front of my door, and I have never managed to eat a fig from this tree, not even one, because the neighborhood boys always climb the tree and rob the figs. So I would like you to grant me the favor and prevent whoever climbs this tree from descending without my permission.”

“So be it!” the Lord said and blessed the fig tree.

This was quite a blessing to perform! The first boy who climbed the tree to pick some figs got stuck to the tree and couldn’t move. The same thing happened to the second boy as well as the third. In short, they all became stuck to the tree by their hands, feet, and heads. When Motive saw that they were caught, he gave them a big scolding and let them go. So, the boys became frightened and never touched the figs again.

The years passed, and Motive’s money ran out. What was he to do? Well, he called a carpenter and said to him, “Can you cut down this fig tree and then make a good-sized flask out of the wood?”

“What a thing to ask? Of course, I can!”

The carpenter made the flask, and the flask retained a magic power from the wood so that Motive could seal up anyone he wanted in the flask. So, one day, when Death came to fetch Motive, who had become very old, Motive turned to Death and said,

“I’ll come along, Mother Death, but look, before we go, I’d like you to do me a favor. I have this flask of wine, and there’s a fly in it. Since I want to have a drink before I go, it would be disgusting to drink the wine with a fly in it. Would you mind crawling in to get the fly out, and then we can go?”

Foolish, foolish Death crawled into the flask, and once she was inside, Motive sealed it with a cork, put the flask in his pocket, and said, “Now you can stay with me for a little while.”

Since Death was sealed up in the flask, nobody could die anymore, and

wherever one went, one saw old people with long white beards. What a spectacle!

When the apostles realized what was happening, they blamed the Lord so that he had to go and settle accounts with Motive.

"Motive, tell me a little why you are keeping Death locked up for so many years. People will continue to get old without ever dying!"

"My Lord," Motive responded, "if you want me to let Death out, promise me that I can enter paradise, and I'll let Death go."

The Lord said to himself, "What am I to do? If I don't grant him this favor, he won't leave me in peace."

So the Lord turned to him and said, "So be it!"

And as soon as he said this, Death was set free. Well, she let Motive live for a few more years, and then went to fetch him. Since then, people say, "*Death does not come without Motive.*"<sup>163</sup>

*Told by Gioacchino Ferrara in Palermo.*

## 125. BROTHER JOHN

**T**ime and again I've heard tell that there was once a convent in Castel-termini, and there were many monks. Among them was one called Brother John. During the time that the Lord wandered the world with apostles, he came to this convent, and all the monks asked a favor of the Lord. But Brother John didn't ask for a thing. So, St. Peter inquired, "Why haven't you asked for a favor like the others?"

"There's nothing I have to ask."

"Nothing?! . . . When you arrive in Heaven, we'll talk about this," responded St. Peter.

Soon, the Lord departed, and when he was at some distance from the convent, Brother John began to call out, "My Lord, wait a second. I want to ask a favor of you. I'd like to have the power to command anyone I want into my hunting sack."

"So be it," the Lord granted his wish.

When Brother John became old, Death arrived and said to him, "John, you have three hours left to live."

163 This is a popular Sicilian proverb: *Un veni morti senza caciùni*. This could also read, "Death does not come without cause or without reason."

"Let me know a half hour before you finally come to fetch me," Brother John responded.

After a couple of hours, Death came and said, "It's time to die!"

But Brother John replied, "In the name of Brother John, into the sack with you!"

Then he carried the sack to the baker and gave it to him.

"My friend," he said, "hang this sack by the chimney stack until I come again."

So, for forty years nobody died, and after forty years Brother John came to get the sack to let out Death so that he could die. After all he was old and could no longer sustain himself. Once he opened the sack and let out Death, the first one to die was Brother John. Then she began putting to death all those people who hadn't died for forty years.

After his death, Brother John went knocking on the gate to Heaven, and St. Peter said to him, "There's no place for you here,"

"Where do I have to go?" Brother John asked.

"To Purgatory," St. Peter responded.

So, Brother John went and knocked at the gate of Purgatory.

"There's no place for you."

"Where do I have to go?"

"To Hell."

So, he went to Hell, and the devil asked, "Who's there?"

"Brother John."

"Hey," he said to his demons. "You take a club!—And you grab a hammer!—You pick up some pincers!"

"What are you going to do with those tools?" Brother John asked.

"I'm sending my demons to kill you!"

"Into the sack all you demons in the name of Brother John!"

Once the demons were in the sack, Brother John carried them to a blacksmith shop where there were eight apprentices and one master blacksmith.

"Master blacksmith, how much do you want to hammer down the stuff in this sack for one week?" Brother John asked, and they agreed upon a price of forty gold coins.

The blacksmith and his apprentices hammered the sack night and day, but they never managed to pound it flat. Brother John remained there the entire time. On the last day, the blacksmith and his apprentices said, "What the devil is inside? We can't hammer the stuff flat!"

"There are demons inside! Keep hammering!"

After they stopped pounding the sack, he carried the sack away and emptied it out on a flat space before the entrance to Hell. The demons were

completely lame and crippled, yet somehow they gathered their strength together and returned to Hell.

Now Brother John decided to go back to Heaven, and when he got there, he knocked at the gate.

“Who’s there?”

“It’s Brother John.”

“There’s no place for you here.”

“Peter, let me enter. If you don’t, you’re nothing but a scurvy<sup>164</sup> person!”

“Well, if you call me a scurvy person,” Peter replied, “I certainly won’t let you enter.”

“Just who do you think you are? You’ll hear from me!” Brother John exclaimed.

He kept standing outside the gates to Heaven, and when the poor souls who wanted to enter arrived, he said, “Into the sack all you poor souls in the name of Brother John!”

So the poor souls could not enter Heaven, and St. Peter went to the Lord and said, “Why can’t the souls enter Heaven anymore?”

And the Lord replied, “Because Brother John is standing in front of the gates to Heaven, and he’s putting all the souls into his sack.”

“What are we going to do?” St. Peter asked.

“See if you can get hold of the sack,” the Lord responded, “and drag it secretly into Heaven.”

Well, Brother John heard this from outside, and what do you think he did? Well, he said to himself, “I’m going to get into the sack myself,” and he climbed right into it.

After St. Peter quietly approached the sack with Brother John inside it, he dragged the sack into Heaven and immediately closed the gate. Then he emptied the sack, and the first one out was Brother John. St. Peter grabbed hold of him and wanted to throw him out of Heaven, but Brother John resisted. And the Lord declared:

Whoever enters the House of Jesus

Will always be welcome to stay among us.<sup>165</sup>

*Told by Giuseppe La Duca and collected by Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

<sup>164</sup> The term used is *tignusu*, which is an expression of disrespect.

<sup>165</sup> A la casa di Gesù

Cu’ trasi ’un nesci cchiù.

This verse was like a popular proverb in Sicily.

## 126. ST. PETER'S MAMA

**W**ord has it that St. Peter's mama was very miserly and never gave alms to anyone, not even a penny. Now, one day while she was preparing to cook leeks, a poor woman came by and said, "Will you please give me something, my good woman!"

"Just about everyone manages to show up here! Here, take this!" St. Peter's mother said and gave her a leek leaf.

When the time came for the Lord to call her to the life beyond, he sent her to Hell. Now St. Peter was in charge of Heaven, and one day, as he was standing by the gate, he heard a voice.

"Oh, Peter, my son! Just see how I'm roasting down below! Go to the Lord, talk to him, and get me out of this mess!"

St. Peter went to the Lord and said to him, "Lord, my mother's in Hell, and you could do me a great favor by letting her out."

"What!" the Lord turned to him. "Your mother's never done a kind thing in her life. The only good thing she's ever done was to give a leek leaf to a poor woman. Well then, let her grab hold of this leaf"—and the Lord pulled out a leek leaf—"and see if you can pull her up to Heaven."

So an angel flew down with the leaf and said, "Take hold of this!"

St. Peter's mama grabbed the leaf, and as she was being pulled out of Hell, all the poor souls who were with her grabbed hold of the seams of her dress. What was she to do? They were tugging her down just as hard as the angel was tugging her up. What a scene! She bellowed at them, kicked at them with her feet, and shook her dress to make them fall. As she was doing this, the mother's leaf was torn, and she fell to the bottom of Hell.

And this is the story of St. Peter's mama.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 127. MASTER FRANCESCO SIT-DOWN-AND-EAT

**O**nce upon a time, so it's been told time and again, there was a cobbler named Master Francesco, and since he was as lazy as could be, the people called him Master Francesco Sit-Down-and-Eat. This master had five daughters, one more beautiful than the next, and they shone radiantly in everything they did just like the sun. But what were the poor things to

do when their father didn't earn a thing and didn't want to work? These maidens were supposed to support him while he did nothing but get up every day, dress himself, go to the nearby tavern, and drink away everything that his daughters earned.

Finally, his daughters forced him to work. So he took his basket and shoe-last, slung them over his shoulder, and went out onto the streets shouting,

"Shoes to repair!"

But who would hire him when everyone knew that he was the laziest man and the worst drunk in the entire town?! After Master Francesco realized that he couldn't even catch a fly in his own town, he went to another one three miles away.

"Does anyone have shoes to repair! Shoes to repair! Shoes to repair!"

The poor man, he was losing his voice and still nobody hired him. In the meantime his stomach was giving him fits just as God commanded.

"Oh! I'm being cuckolded by fate!" Master Francesco exclaimed. "Do you really want me dead? I'm so hungry I could eat my own flesh? . . . I swear by the saints, I can't go on! . . . Shoes to repair!"

Just as it was about to get dark, a lady called to him from a beautiful palace.

"Repair the slipper that I've thrown down there on the street."

After Master Francesco repaired it, the lady gave him a gold coin and said to him, "I know that you have five unmarried beautiful daughters. Well, I'm sick and need a diligent maiden who will look after me. Do you want to give me one of your daughters as a maid?"

"Yes, my lady," Master Francesco replied. "I'll send one of them to you tomorrow."

So he departed and returned home, where he recounted all that had happened. Then he said to his oldest daughter, "I want you to go there tomorrow."

Now let's leave him and follow the daughter who went to the lady the next morning.

"Ah! You've come, my daughter! Sit down here and give me a kiss. From now on you'll live here and be happy, and you can enjoy all the trifles you want. As you can see, I can't move from the bed so that you are mistress of everything in the house. Go, my daughter, sweep the rooms and tidy up the house. Then get washed and dress yourself in clean clothes. That way, when my husband comes, he'll find everything in order."

The maiden began to sweep the floor and pushed away the footboard to get at the dust beneath the bed. Well, what do you think she saw?! There was a tail that appeared to extend from the lady's behind.

"Help me!" she cried out. "There's an ogress under there, not a lady! Save me!"

And she backed away from the bed, retreating quickly.

"I told you to sweep everywhere, but I didn't want you to sweep under the bed!" the lady yelled.

But the maiden managed to slip out of the room into another one, and quick as a flash, she headed toward her home.

Now let's turn back to Master Franceso. When he saw that his daughter was back in their home, he asked, "How come you've returned?"

"Father, she's a Mamma-draga, not a lady. A real ogress! I'm afraid. I saw a black hairy tail beneath the bed, and I don't want to return anymore."

"What's so bad about this?" Master Francesco said. "Well, you'll stay at home from now on, and we'll send your second sister."

And this is what he did. He sent his second daughter, and the lady gave her the same caresses and told her the same things. But this maiden was on her guard on account of what her elder sister had said. When she caught the first sight of the tail, she fled like a ball bouncing off a wall and raced home where she told everything to her sister and father in great detail without mincing words.

Master Francesco could not find any peace of mind upon realizing that he might lose the lady's good money because of his daughters' fears. It was a nice sum that would enable him to eat and dress well without working. So what did he do? He sent the third daughter, then the next, until there was only the youngest daughter left, and she, too, returned home frightened by the hairy black tail of the Mamma-draga.

"It's better here," they said. "It's better to be in our home and work day and night, sweating blood, wearing our little clean things even though they're old rags, than to live with the ogress, eat and dress well and do very little work. Surely, the ogress would have eaten us at one point or the other. Father, if you want such a life, then go and live with the ogress."

From this moment on, Master Francesco gave himself no peace, and even took to hitting his head against the wall.

"Is it possible," he thought, "that my daughters don't want to earn anything and that they especially don't want to earn anything for me? But there's nothing to do about this. They're too many of them. Besides, they're too young, and I can't force them to work. The best thing would be if I go to the lady and offer my services. The work is light, the lady likes me, and I'll live there and eat and dress like a prince."

Indeed, this is what he did. He went to the Mamma-draga and told her everything. The Mamma-draga began to treat him like a prince. She gave him beautiful clothes, good food, numerous gold rings, and as many trifles that he wanted so he could amuse himself. All he had to do was to go shopping for

her husband the ogre and clean the room and tidy up the Mamma-draga's things. Then he could put one foot over the next, rest, and be content. But after a few days, the Mamma-draga grabbed him and began embracing him. Indeed, she squeezed him so tightly that he couldn't escape.

"Sit down. It's time to eat," she said. "Where do you want me to start, your head or your feet?"

When Master Francesco realized that the game was over, he shriveled and shook like a leaf.

"Why didn't I listen to my daughters and my wife?" he said. "My feet."

So, starting with his feet, the Mamma-draga took one big bite and swallowed him whole without leaving a single bone.


His daughters remained happy and content, and Master Francesco died like a stinking pig.

Whoever told this tale and whoever will soon get to tell it

Will not suffer the same fate and die like a no-good nitwit.

*Told by Francesca Leto to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 128. SADDÆDDA

nce upon a time, so it's been told time and again, there was a mother with a daughter who was crazy. The mother, who was very poor, supported herself and her daughter by gathering fruit in the countryside.

Nearby there lived a very wealthy neighbor, and when this neighbor died, the good woman was placed in a coffin wearing a red dress with all her earrings, rings, and many other things. Then she was carried in the coffin for burial at Pilacca, and Saddaедda, that crazy girl, appeared there. When she entered the church, she stepped into the confessional box. Later, all the good people departed, and she was left alone. So she got out of the confessional box and began to take off the earrings from the dead lady, then her necklace, her rings, her dress, and finally her stockings. First she took off one stocking, then the other, but as she tugged at the stocking, she pulled off the entire leg.

But that's not all she did, for now she said, "I'm going to put the leg into a chest, and after I prepare it, I'll cook it," the girl said, who was, indeed, crazy.

So she went shopping for sausages, macaroni, cheese, figs, and sweets, and after she ate, she went to bed. During the night, the dead woman came.

"Knock, knock!"

“Who is it?” the girl asked.

“It’s me. Give me my leg with the stocking.”

But the girl didn’t respond, and the dead woman departed. In the meantime, it became dawn, and what do you think the girl did? Well, she went and bought macaroni, sweets, meat, and sausages, even though the wicked<sup>166</sup> girl knew that the dead lady had come knocking at her door the night before. She began to stroll through the streets and called out, “Who wants to come to my place and eat some macaroni, sweets, and sausages!”

When the boys and girls heard her, they went to their mothers and asked, “Can we go and eat with Saddaедda?”

Soon they gathered together at Saddaедda’s house, and after Saddaедda cooked, they ate and went to bed. In the meantime the dead woman arrived and cried out, “Saddaедda, Saddaедda, give me my leg with the stocking!”

But the girl didn’t respond, and the dead woman knocked on the door. Her friends yelled, “You wicked girl, what did you steal?”

“I didn’t steal anything! Why should I steal?”

But her friends left, and the next day Saddaедda went to buy some sausages, a little meat, and macaroni. After she returned home and cooked everything, she went out to see her friends.

“Get out of here! You’re wicked! We know that from last night!”

So Saddaедda went to another street and cried out, “Who wants to come to my house? I’ll give you macaroni and sausages!”

Since the boys and girls on this street didn’t know any better, they went to eat the delicious things and were going to spend the night with Saddaедda. When it turned dark, the dead woman returned.

“Saddaедda, Saddaедda, give me the leg with the stocking on it!”

The boys and girls cried out to her.

“What are you doing? Are you going to murder us?”

“I’m not going to do anything to you.”

The next day when dawn arrived, the dead woman returned to the grave where she was buried. Saddaедda went out looking for some playmates, but nobody wanted to go to her home. So Saddaедda went to a girl who lived nearby.

“Do you want me to spend some time with you this evening? I’m going to buy some macaroni and sweets, and you can provide the flour.”

“Sure, why not?” the girl responded. “See you this evening.”

That night the dead woman came knocking at the door.

166 Pitre wrote that he asked the narrator why she called Saddaедda wicked, and this was her response to him: “Not even I know! That’s the way the tale is.”

"Saddaedda, Saddaedda, give me my leg with the stocking!"

When the girl heard this, she said to Saddaedda, "Get out of here! You can't sleep here any longer!"

That very same night, the girl sent Saddaedda away because she was frightened. So, Saddaedda was desperate and returned home. Later in the night the dead woman came and knocked.

"Saddaedda, Saddaedda, give me the leg with the stocking!"

But Saddaedda didn't respond. So the dead lady forced the door open, entered, and stood before her bed.

"Saddaedda, Saddaedda!"

She grabbed her by the throat, tightened her grip, and strangled her. After Saddaedda died, the dead lady opened the chest, took the leg with her stocking, and went back to her grave.

The next morning the neighbors came and knocked at Saddaedda's door, but the girl was dead. They saw that the chest was empty, and then they summoned her mother and buried Saddaedda. Her mother was somewhat relieved by her daughter's death because Saddaedda was crazy.

And that's the end of the tale.

*Told by Maria Curatolo in Erice.*

## 129. THE SLICED ROOSTER

There's a tale that was once told time and again about two friends. Each one wanted to breed some chicks. One woman had a hen but racked her brains trying to find some eggs, and the other had some eggs and went out looking for a hen. Well, one morning they happened to cross paths.

"Say, friend, where are you going?"

"I'm looking for some eggs so that I can breed some chicks."

"Well, I also want to breed some chicks, and I've got some eggs, but I don't have a hen."

"You know what I say to you?" one of the women proposed. "I'll bring the hen, and you bring the eggs. Then we'll divide the chicks that hatch from the eggs."

"What a great idea!"

And that's what they did. When it came time for the eggs to be hatched, the chicks were somewhat big. So they divided them equally, one by one, until

there was just an odd one left. What do think they did? Well, they sliced it in half, and each woman took a sliced chicken. One of them took pity on her sliced chick and refused to eat it. She cleaned its guts and crop very thoroughly and began feeding it by its beak with bread crumbs. And she kept doing this until the chick survived. In the meantime, all the other chicks died from poor health. They died one after the other as if they had consumption. Only the sliced chick survived, and the woman loved him more than she loved her own eyes.

One morning she had to bake bread, and there was no more flour. So she had to go out and drop what she was doing. When she returned after two hours, however, she found a fine loaf of bread, baked in the oven, a marvel to behold.

“Jesus! Who did this? How kind!”

She had no idea of who it was that baked the bread. But, I’ll tell you, it was the sliced rooster, for some fairies had passed by and had cast a spell on the chick that had become a rooster. Another time, when the woman departed her home at daybreak and had left everything hanging up in the air, she returned only to find that the beds had been made, the house had been swept, and that everything had been cleared away and perfectly arranged.

“Oh!” she cried out. “Something’s wrong here! Who in the world’s been doing all these things?”

One day this woman was beside herself because she did not have anyone to send and buy some pasta for her.

“What shall I do?”

“Mother, do you want me to go?” the sliced rooster said to her.

“Jesus, the sliced rooster is talking! Well, my son, how could you possibly do this?”

“It’s simple, mother. We’ll do it like this: you wrap the money in a napkin and tie it to my feet. Just leave the rest to me.”

No sooner said than done. The sliced rooster departed and went to the pasta maker.

“I want half a pound of pasta! I want half a pound of pasta!”

“Oh, how annoying this sliced rooster is!” the pasta maker cried out. “You’re out of line. Get in place! I only serve those who deserve to be served first, and you were the last one.”

At this point the sliced rooster felt offended. So he ran to the pasta maker’s feet and began pecking them with his beak, and that truly hurt, because each peck tore out a piece of his flesh.

“Ow! Ow!” cried the pasta maker. “The bird’s eating my feet. Make it quick, very quick, and serve this sliced rooster and send it on its way!”

So they gave the sliced rooster the pasta and tied it on his feet. Then he carried it to his mother who was very happy when she received it.

The next day the woman had to buy some olive oil.

"How can I do this? There's nobody I can send."

"Mother," said the sliced rooster, "attach the money to me, and I'll go and buy the oil."

The woman did what the sliced rooster told her to do, and although the bird had to give some pecks to the oil dealer, he got the oil quickly enough and carried it to his mother. And this was the way that things went in the following days. The sliced rooster provided the service for his mother (and he always called her his mother).

One day it so happened that the mother had to send the pig out to pasture outside the village, and she didn't have anyone who could do this for her. So the sliced rooster said to her, "I'll do this for you."

"But how can you look after such a large pig?"

"Don't you want me to do this? Just attach the pig to my feet with a rope, and that's all that you have to do."

Well, the woman attached the pig to the sliced rooster's feet, and they departed in fine fashion; the sliced rooster led the way followed by the pig. Once they reached a dung heap outside the village, the pig began to scavenge with its muzzle just as it usually did when it was looking for food. It scavenged for a while, and soon it dug up a beautiful steel chest locked with three keys. When the sliced rooster managed to open the chest, he saw that it was full of money and gold and silver coins.

"What am I going to do?" the sliced rooster said to himself. "I can't carry such a load to my mother. I'll see now if some one will carry it for me."

He looked around, and soon he saw two soldiers.

"Hey, you two! Would you carry this chest for me to my mother?"

"Ah, you rascal!" the soldiers responded. "Is that chest yours? Don't you know that anything you find belongs to the king? Get out of here! We're going to carry the chest to the king."

And indeed, they picked up the chest and brought it to the king, while the sliced rooster was helpless.

"Ah, highway thieves!" he said. "You wait and see whether that chest belongs to me or the king."

The sliced rooster returned immediately to his house with the pig, and then he began running to the king's palace. On his way he met several thousand bees, and they asked, "Where are you going in such a hurry, friend sliced rooster?"

"I'm going to the king to demand the steel chest of money that he unlawfully took from me."

"Would you like us to come with you?"

"Of course. Quick, quick! Fly into the rear end of my tail."

The bees quickly zoomed around and flew into the sliced rooster's rear end. Then the sliced rooster continued on his way, and he came across a river.

"Where are you going in such a hurry, my friend sliced rooster?"

"I'm going to the king to demand my iron chest."

"Do you want me to go with you?"

"Of course, come along."

"How can I do it?"

"Make it quick, very quick, and get into my rear end!"

This is what the river did, and the sliced rooster continued on his way until he met a pack of wolves.

"Friend sliced rooster, why are you in such a rush?"

"I'm running to the king to demand that he return the steel chest to me."

"Good! Could we come along with you?"

"Of course, come along."

"How?"

"Make it quick and slip into my rear end."

The wolves crawled into the sliced rooster's rear end just as they were told, and when the sliced rooster reached the king's palace, he stood before the gates and cried out with a loud voice, "I want the chest of money! I want the chest of money! I want the chest of money!"

Then he ran and began pecking at the guard until the man became bloody and lacerated. So the guard ran to the king and told him what had happened.

"Your majesty, there's a sliced rooster who's shouting that he wants the chest of money, and he's scratched me all over with his beak, and I won't go near him because I fear for my life. What should I do?"

"Have him come here to me."

So the guard led the sliced rooster to the king, who asked, "What do you want?"

"I want the chest of money that I found. It's mine and not yours. If you don't give it to me, I'll finish off everyone with my beak."

"Ah, you rogue," the king replied. "Is this the way that you speak to a king?—Guards, take this fearless sliced rooster and throw him into the stable where the horses will all pound him to death with their hooves."

Four soldiers grabbed hold of the sliced rooster and took him to the stable and placed him beneath the hooves of the horses. Then they immediately shut the stable doors. All at once the horses started pounding.

"Oh, my friends," he cried out to the wolves. "Help me!"

Well the wolves climbed out of his rear end and devoured all the king's horses. When the king heard the clamor in the stable, he said, "Go and see if the sliced rooster has been killed."

The soldiers went and returned to the king completely frightened.

"Oh, your majesty," they yelled, "what a massacre! All the horses have been torn apart and eaten!"

"What about the sliced rooster?"

"He's sitting there on top of the horses' feeding troughs and singing a song."

"Quick, bring him here and lock him up! Heat up an oven for three nights and three days. Then throw the rooster into the oven."

And this is what the soldiers did. They heated an oven three nights and three days. Then they grabbed the sliced rooster and threw him into the oven and covered it with an iron plate.

"Oh friend river, help me!" the sliced rooster cried out.

So the river streamed out of his rear end and extinguished the fire in the oven and made it as freezing as ice. The next day the king sent his soldiers to see if the sliced rooster was dead.

"By now," he said, "the rooster must be ashes."

The soldiers lifted the iron plate, and all at once the sliced rooster jumped out and began crying, "Cock a doodle do! Cock a doodle do! Where's the king because I want the chest of money! Cock a doodle do! I want the chest of money!"

There was nothing more the king could do. So he said, "Grab the rooster and stick him into my chamber pot. When I relieve my bowels, my load will kill him!"

So the soldiers stuck the sliced rooster into the chamber pot, and the king sat down on it.

"Oh, my friend bees, help me!" the sliced rooster cried out.

All the bees flew out of the sliced rooster's rear end and stung the king all over his bottom.

"All right, all right!" the king screamed. "All right, otherwise I'll die. Help!"

The guards came running and asked, "What is it, your majesty?"

"Quick," he said, "give the chest of money to this sliced rooster. Carry it for him to his house. Give him whatever other money he wants, because I can't go on like this anymore. Who knows what kind of devil he is!"

The guards gave the sliced rooster whatever he wanted along with the chest of money, and they carried it all to his house. This was the way that the sliced

rooster's mother became rich, and from then on she displayed her wealth with palaces and carriages. And the sliced rooster was always with her.

Well, they've remained happy and content

While we just sit here without a cent.

*Told by Margherita Martorana, a washerwoman in Partinico, and collected by Salvatore Salomone-Marino.*

### 130. DON FIRRIULIEDDU

Once upon a time, so it's been told time and again, there was a farmer who had a daughter, and her father used to go and work in the fields without any food. His wife would prepare the food for him and the daughter would carry it to him. One time, the father said, "Pay attention, I'm going to spread some bran along the ground so you'll know where to find me."

After the farmer departed and had spread the bran, the ogre happened to pass by the trail, and when he saw the bran spread over it, he said to himself, "This means something." So, he picked up the bran that had been spread by the farmer and scattered it on the path that led to his house. When the daughter departed to carry the food to her father, she followed the bran and arrived at the ogre's house. As soon as he saw her, he grabbed hold of her and said, "You must become my wife."

Well, the girl could do nothing but burst into tears.

In the meantime, when her father saw that his daughter had not come to him in the field, he went home in the evening and began searching for her. Since he was unable to find her, he begged God to give him a son or another daughter. After a year he and his wife had a son, and they named him Don Firriulieddu. When the baby was three days old, it spoke and said, "Well, have you made a cloak for me? Give me a dog and a cloak because I must go and look for my sister."

So, he set out walking and went in search for his sister. When he arrived at a plain, he saw a large number of men and said, "Who's the owner of these cows?"

The herdsman replied,

"They belong to the ogre

Who fears neither God nor the saints,

But he fears Don Firriulieddu

Who was born three days ago and has set out on his way  
 And gives bread to his dog and says,  
 Eat, my dog, and do not bark  
 For there's much we must do."

Later on Don Firriulieddu saw a flock of sheep and asked, "Who's the owner of these sheep?"

And he received the same response:

"They belong to the ogre  
 Who fears neither God nor the saints,  
 But he fears Don Firriulieddu  
 Who was born three days ago and has set out on his way  
 And gives bread to his dog and says,  
 Eat, my dog, and do not bark  
 For there's much we must do."

When he arrived at the ogre's house, he knocked at the door, and his sister opened the door and saw the baby boy.

"Who are you looking for?" she asked.

"I'm looking for you because I'm your brother, and I'm going to take you back to mama."

When the ogre learned that Don Firriulieddu had come, he went upstairs and hid. Meanwhile, Don Firriulieddu asked his sister, "Where is the ogre?"

"He's hiding upstairs."

Then he gave a command to his dog: "Run up the stairs and bark, and I'll be right behind you."

The dog rushed up the stairs and began barking. Don Firriulieddu followed and killed the ogre. He took his sister and a good sum of money and returned to their mother. From that time on they were all content.

*Told by the waiter Giuseppe Tripi and collected by Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

## 131. PITIDDA

**I**t's been told time and again that there was once a mother who had a daughter called Pitidda, and one day she said to her, "Go sweep the house."

"First give me some bread."

“Go sweep the house.”

“No, I can’t,” she responded.

When her mother saw that she refused to sweep the house, she called the wolf.

“Wolf, go and kill Pitidda, for she won’t sweep the house.”

“No, I can’t,” responded the wolf.

“Dog,” said the mother, “go and kill the wolf, for he won’t kill Pitidda and Pitidda won’t sweep the house.”

“No, I can’t.”

“Stick, go and kill the dog, for the dog won’t kill the wolf, and the wolf won’t kill Pitidda, and Pitidda won’t sweep the house.”

“No, I can’t.”

“Fire, go and burn the stick, for the stick won’t kill the dog, and the dog won’t kill the wolf, and the wolf won’t kill Pitidda, and Pitidda won’t sweep the house.”

“No, I can’t.”

“Water, go and quench the fire, for the fire won’t burn the stick, and the stick won’t kill the dog, and the dog won’t kill the wolf, and the wolf won’t kill Pitidda, and Pitidda won’t sweep the house.”

“No, I can’t.”

“Cow, go drink the water, for the water won’t quench the fire, and the fire won’t burn the stick, and the stick won’t kill the dog, and the dog won’t kill the wolf, and the wolf won’t kill Pitidda, for Pitidda won’t sweep the house.”

“No, I can’t.”

“Rope, go and choke the cow, for the cow won’t drink the water, and the water won’t quench the fire, and the fire won’t burn the stick, and the stick won’t kill the dog, and the dog won’t kill the wolf, and the wolf won’t kill Pitidda, and Pitidda won’t sweep the house.”

“No, I can’t.”

“Mouse, go and gnaw the rope, for the rope won’t choke the cow, and the cow won’t drink the water, and the water won’t quench the fire, and the fire won’t burn the stick, and the stick won’t kill the dog, and the dog won’t kill the wolf, and the wolf won’t kill Pitidda, and Pitidda won’t sweep the house.”

“No, I won’t.”

“Cat, go and eat the mouse, for the mouse won’t gnaw the rope, and the rope won’t choke the cow, and the cow won’t drink the water, and the water won’t quench the fire, and the fire won’t burn the stick, and the stick won’t kill the dog, and the dog won’t kill the wolf, and the wolf won’t kill Pitidda, and Pitidda won’t sweep the house.”

So the cat ran to eat the mouse, while the mouse ran to gnaw the rope, the

rope ran to choke the cow, the cow ran to drink the water, the water ran to quench the fire, the fire ran to burn the stick, the stick ran to kill the dog, the dog ran to kill the wolf, the wolf ran to kill Pitidda, Pitidda ran to sweep the house, and the mother ran and gave her some bread.

*Told by Francesca Leto to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 132. GODMOTHER FOX

Once upon a time there was Godmother Fox and Godmother Goat. Well, Godmother Fox had a tiny little house, and it was nicely adorned with little chairs, cups, and dishes. In short, it was beautifully furnished. One time, however, Godmother Goat came and carried off the little house. Godmother Fox began to weep when along came a dog that barked and said, “Why are you weeping?”

“Godmother Goat has carried off my house!” she replied

“Stop weeping. I’ll get it back for you.”

So the dog went and said to Godmother Goat, “Give back the house to Godmother Fox.”

“I’m Godmother Goat,” she replied. “I’ve got a sword by my side, and with my horns I can shred you to pieces.”

When the dog heard all this, he scrambled.

Then a sheep passed by Godmother Fox’s place and said, “Why are you weeping?”

And Godmother Fox told her the same thing. So, the sheep went to Godmother Goat and began scolding her. Then Godmother Goat responded and told her the same thing she told the dog, and the sheep scrambled.

In short, all sorts of animals went to the goat, and she gave them the same warning. Among the animals, there was a mouse, and this mouse went to the fox and said, “Why are you weeping?”

“Godmother Goat has carried off my little house.”

“Stop weeping. I’ll make her give it back to you.

So, the mouse went and said to Godmother Goat, “Give the house back to Godmother Fox right now!”

“I’m Godmother Goat,” she declared. “I have a sword by my side, and with my fist and horns I’ll tear you to shreds.”

“Oh yeah,” the mouse responded right away. “Well, I’m Godfather Mouse, and I have a spit by my side, and once I heat it with fire, I’ll stick it up your ass.”

My tale's been printed, my tale's been told.

Tell me yours, for mine's now old.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

### 133. THE GOAT AND THE NUN

Once upon a time there was a nun, and one evening, when it became dark, she was in her house and went out to light the candles. Meanwhile, a herd of goats passed by, and one of the goats went inside the house and slipped under the nun's bed. When the nun returned, she didn't notice anything, and she began to get ready for bed. But as she got into bed, she realized that the goat was there.

"Uggh! What can I do with this goat? Get out of there, goat!"

"I'm a real goat with shining eyes and sharp horns, and if you don't get out of here, I'll tear open your stomach!"

The nun ran to call her neighbor, "Sister Rosa, please help me get rid of this goat!"

Sister Rosa came and said, "Get out of there, goat!"

"I'm a real goat with shining eyes and sharp horns, and if you don't get out of here, I'll tear open your stomach."

"Oh sister," Rosa cried out, "you'll have to get rid of the goat yourself!"

So now the nun called a dog and said, "Friend dog, would you please help me get rid of this goat?"

So the dog went and said, "Hey pal, get out of there!"

"I'm a real goat with shining eyes and sharp horns, and if you don't get out of here, I'll tear open your stomach!"

"Oh, sister, you'll have to get rid of the goat yourself."

Now she called a pig and said, "Friend pig, would you please help me get rid of this goat?"

So the pig went inside and said, "Get out of there, goat!"

"I'm a real goat with shining eyes and sharp horns, and if you don't get out of here, I'll tear open your stomach!"

"Oh," responded the pig to the nun, "you'll have to get rid of the goat yourself, for I'm not up to it."

So the nun called and called until her neighbor the farmer came.

"Friend, would you please help me get rid of this goat?"

Now the farmer went and yelled, "Get out, goat!"

As usual the reply was: "I'm a real goat with shining eyes and sharp horns, and if you don't get out of here, I'll tear open your stomach!"

"Oh, sister," the farmer said to the nun, "this isn't something for me. You'll have to get rid of the goat yourself."

After a while, a cricket passed by, and the nun cried out, "Oh, friend cricket, would you please help me get rid of this goat?"

"I'll come and get rid of it for you, sister," the cricket replied and went inside and approached the bed.

"Get out of there, goat!"

"I'm a real goat with shining eyes and sharp horns, and if you don't get out of here, I'll tear open your stomach!"

"And I'm a real cricket with three crowns on my head, and if you don't leave, I'll sting your ass!"

"Of course, I'll get out! Of course!"

And the goat ran like a bat out of hell.

Now the nun bolted her door and lay down to sleep.

Of course she was happy and slept in peace

While we sit here and grind our teeth.

*Told by Francesca Leto to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 134. THE CAT AND THE MOUSE

Once upon a time there was a cat who wanted to get married. So he went and stood at a street corner, and everyone who passed by said to him, "Little cat, what's the matter?"

"What's the matter? I want to get married."

A dog passed by and said, "Do you want to marry me?"

"Only if I hear how well you sing."

So the dog turned to the cat and barked, "Bow-wow!"

"Uggh! What a revolting sound! Get out of here! I don't want you."

Some time passed, and a pig came by.

"Little cat, do you want to marry me?"

"Only if I can hear how well you sing?"

"Oink! Oink!"

"Uggh! What a revolting sound! Get out of here! I don't want you."

Now a cow passed and said, "Little cat, do you want to marry me?"

"Only if I can hear how well you sing?"

“Moo! Moo!”

“Uggh! What a revolting sound! Get out of here! I don’t want you.”

Finally, a mouse passed and said, “Little cat, what are you doing?”

“I’m going to get married.”

“Do you want to marry me?”

“How well do you sing?”

“Peep! Peep!”

The cat picked her and said, “I like you. So, let’s get married.”

And so they were married.

One day the cat went to get some pasta and left the mouse alone. “Don’t move about in there. I’m going to buy some pasta,” he said.

But the mouse entered the kitchen, noticed the pot that was cooking, and slipped inside it because she wanted to eat the beans. However, she failed to eat them because the pot was boiling and the mouse got stuck inside. When the little cat returned, he began to weep, but the little mouse didn’t appear. So, the cat mixed the pasta in the pot and began to eat. When the pasta was cooked, he ate it and put some on a plate for the little mouse. As he took out the pasta, he saw that the mouse was mixed in it.

“Oh, my little mouse! Oh, my little mouse!”

The cat went and sat behind the door weeping about the mouse.

“What’s the matter?” asked the door. “Why are you scratching yourself and tearing out your hair?”

“What’s the matter? The mouse has died, and I’m scratching and tearing out my hair because of this!” the cat responded.

“Well then, I as door will slam.”

In the door was a window that said, “What’s the matter, door? Why are you slamming?”

“The little mouse is dead. The cat is scratching and pulling out his hair, and I’m slamming.”

“Well, I as window, will open and shut,” the window responded.

In the window was a tree that said, “What’s the matter, window? Why are you opening and shutting?”

“The little mouse is dead. The cat is scratching and pulling out his hair. The door is slamming, and I’m opening and shutting,” the window replied.

“Well, I as tree will hurl myself down.”

A bird happened to fly and land on the tree and said, “Why did you hurl yourself down, tree?”

“The little mouse is dead. The cat is scratching and pulling out his hair. The door is slamming. The window is opening and shutting, and I as tree have hurled myself to the ground.”

"And I as bird will pluck out my feathers."

So the bird flew to a fountain, and the fountain said, "Why are you plucking your feathers, bird?"

And the bird told the fountain all that had happened: "The little mouse is dead. The cat is scratching and pulling out his hair. The door is slamming. The window is opening and shutting. The tree has hurled itself to the ground, and I as bird am plucking my feathers."

"Well, I as fountain will dry up."

Now a cuckoo arrived at the fountain to drink and said, "Why are you drying up, fountain?"

And the fountain told the cuckoo, "The little mouse is dead. The cat is scratching and pulling out his hair. The door is slamming. The window is opening and shutting. The tree has hurled itself to the ground. The bird is plucking its feathers, and I'm drying up."

"And I as cuckoo will put my tail in the fire."

Just then a monk of St. Nicholas happened to pass by and said, "Why is your tail in the fire?"

"The little mouse is dead. The cat is scratching and pulling out his hair. The door is slamming. The window is opening and shutting. The tree has hurled itself to the ground. The bird is plucking its feathers. The well is drying up, and I am putting my tail in the fire."

"And I as monk of St. Nicholas will go and say mass without my robes."

Then the queen happened to pass by and said, "Monk of St. Nicholas, how can you say the mass without your robes?"

"The little mouse is dead. The cat is scratching and pulling out his hair. The door is slamming. The window is opening and shutting. The tree has hurled itself to the ground. The bird is plucking its feathers. The well is drying up. The cuckoo is putting its tail in the fire, and I, as monk of St. Nicholas, am saying the mass without my robes."

"And I as queen will go and sift the flour."

Just then the king happened to pass by and said, "Oh, queen, why are you sifting the flour?"

"The little mouse is dead. The cat is scratching and pulling out his hair. The door is slamming. The window is opening and shutting. The tree has hurled itself to the ground. The bird is plucking its feathers. The well is drying up. The cuckoo is putting its tail in the fire. The monk of St. Nicholas is saying the mass without its robes, and I as queen am sifting the flour."

"And I as king am going to drink a cup of coffee."

*Told by Angela Smiraglia in Capaci.*

## 135. THE SEXTON'S NOSE

Once upon a time, so it's been told, there was a sexton who swept the floors of the church every morning. Well, one morning, while he was sweeping he found a coin. He picked it up and put it into his pocket. After he finished his work, he began to think of what he might buy with the coin. "If I buy walnuts," he said to himself, "I'll have the mice on my hands. If I buy almonds, I'll have the mice on my hands. If I buy hazelnuts, I'll have the mice on my hands. I think it's best to buy roasted peas and then eat them."

And that is what he did. He bought some roasted peas and ate them one by one on the street. When he got to the last one, he decided to save it. So he went to a nearby bakery shop and said to the woman, "Please save this roasted pea for me. I'll pick it up tomorrow."

"Of course," she said. "Just put it on the bench over there."

Then the sexton left to take care of his business. After a while the shopkeeper wanted to put the pea in a safe place, but she saw that the cock had eaten it. The next day the sexton came and asked for the roasted pea, and the shopkeeper said that the cock had eaten it. Master Seppi (for that was the sexton's name) became furious and yelled, "Either you give me the pea, or you give me the cock!" And he kept yelling the same thing for quite some time until the shopkeeper finally gave him the bird to get him off her back.

"Take it!" she said. "And go have yourself written up in the book of fools!"

Master Seppi grabbed the cock, and since there was no place to put it in the church, he carried it to the miller's wife, a friend of his, and said, "My friend, please keep this cock in a safe place for me until I come and get it."

"Of course, I will, Master Seppi. Leave it here, and I'll find a good place to keep it safe."

The sexton left the cock and went to take care of his business. It so happened that at this time the miller's wife was tending a pig, and that morning she had put some bran into a vat for the pig. When the cock saw the bran, it went over to peck at it, and the pig killed it and swallowed it. The next day Master Seppi came and asked for the cock. The miller's wife was very confused and said, "Master Seppi, what could I do? Yesterday the cock began nibbling at the bran that belonged to the pig, and when the pig went to eat the bran, it took a big bite of the cock and in the wink of an eye *whoosh!* the cock was killed."

"Well, what are you going to do?" the sexton responded. "I'll tell you what: either you give me the cock, or you give me the pig! Either you give me the cock, or you give me the pig!" And he continued whimpering and saying the same thing over and over again until the miller's wife was forced to give him the pig.

Master Seppi took the pig, but he had no place to put it. So he brought it to the wife of the macaroni-maker, a friend of his, and said, "Brigida, my friend, I'd appreciate it if you would do me a favor and keep this pig in a safe place. I'll return for it tomorrow."

"Of course, I will," the macaroni-maker's wife said. "Put it there. You know our home is your home."

So this is what Master Seppi did. He left the pig there and went off to take care of his own business. Now it so happened that the macaroni-maker's wife had a daughter who was engaged, and the next day she was supposed to marry. Well her mother began thinking, and since she was sly and treacherous, she decided to kill the pig because it would make a great feast for her daughter's wedding. Then she would tell Master Seppi that the pig had run away. So this is what she did. That night she slaughtered the pig. As they say, what you don't know won't harm you. The next morning Master Seppi came in a cheerful mood to take the pig. When the macaroni-maker's wife saw him, she was the first to speak.

"What's this, Master Seppi, don't you know? The pig ripped off the cord and ran away from the stall, and we can't find it."

The sexton was enraged. He hit himself and began crying and pulling out his hair.

"I know something's wrong! I know something's wrong! Either you give me the pig, or you give me your daughter! Either you give me the pig, or you give me your daughter!"

And he lamented and whined so much the macaroni-maker's wife gave him her daughter just to get rid of him. So, after putting her into a sack, Master Seppi, who did not know how to read or write, threw the sack over his shoulders and went off to take care of his business. But do you think he carried her to the church? No, he couldn't do that because the priest was there. So he decided to bring her to a shop-owner, who was a friend, and he said to her, "Cecilia, my friend, permit me to leave this sack of bran here? Tomorrow I'll come and pick it up."

"Of course, Master Seppi. Put it over there in the corner, and you'll find it where you've left it."

Master Seppi did just that and then went off to take care of his business. By chance the woman kept chickens, and it occurred to her that she could feed

them with some of the bran. When she went to open the sack, however, she found the maiden inside.

"Who did this to you?" she asked.

"Ah, my friend, it's just my luck that I've been brought here," she said and told the shopkeeper everything.

When the woman heard her story, she took the maiden out of the sack and decided to put a dog in her place. Then she told the maiden, "Go and stay inside that room over there."

The next morning Master Seppi appeared and asked for the sack. The shopkeeper gave him the sack with the dog inside, and he put the sack on his shoulder and carried it to the seashore intending to throw the girl into the sea. When he arrived at the seashore, he opened the sack, and the furious dog bit him and took a big chunk off his nose. Now, how do you think Master Seppi felt? Well, he felt lacerated and blood streamed down his cheeks like father *Ecce-Homu*.<sup>167</sup> Then he pleaded with the dog and said, "Dog, dog, give me some hair that I can put into my nose so I can heal the wound."<sup>168</sup>

"If you want some hair," the dog responded, "give me some bread!"

The sexton ran as fast as he could to a bakery and said, "Baker, give me some bread so I can give it to the dog. The dog will give me hair. Then I'll put the hair on my nose, and my wound will be healed."

"If you want bread," the baker replied, "give me wood."

So, Master Seppi ran as fast as he could to the carpenter.

"Carpenter, give me some wood so I can give it to the baker. The baker will give me some bread that I can give to the dog, and the dog will give me hair that I can put on my nose, and my wound will be healed."

"If you want wood," the carpenter responded, "give me a saw."

So the sexton ran as fast as he could to the blacksmith and said, "Blacksmith, give me a saw that I can give to the carpenter. The carpenter will give me some wood that I can give to the baker. The baker will give me some bread that I can give to the dog, and the dog will give me hair that I can put on my nose, and my wound will be healed."

"If you want a saw," the blacksmith said, "give me some coal."

So the sexton ran as fast as he could to the collier and said, "Collier, give me some coal that I can give to the blacksmith. The blacksmith will give me a saw that I can give to the carpenter. The carpenter will give me some wood that I can give to the baker. The baker will give me some bread that I can give to the

<sup>167</sup> Crucified like Jesus Christ.

<sup>168</sup> In the folk medicine in Sicily, people believed that it was necessary to have some hair from the dog to heal a wound if one was bitten by a dog.

dog, and the dog will give me hair that I can put on my nose, and my wound will be healed.”

“If you want coal,” the collier said, “give me a cart.”

So the sexton ran as fast as he could to the wagon-maker and said, “Wagon-maker, give me a cart that I can give to the collier. The collier will give me some coal that I can give it to the blacksmith. The blacksmith will give me a saw that I can give to the carpenter. The carpenter will give me some wood that I can give to the baker. The baker will give me some bread that I can give to the dog, and the dog will give me hair that I can put on my nose, and my wound will be healed.”

The wagon-maker looked at the large wound on Master Seppi’s face, and he was moved to compassion and gave him the cart. Now the sexton was happy and took the cart to the collier. The collier gave him some coal. Then he brought the coal to the blacksmith who gave him the saw that he brought to the carpenter. So the carpenter gave him some wood that he carried to the baker who gave him some bread. Then he carried the bread to the dog who gave him some hair, and the sexton put the hair on his nose, and his wound was healed.

The tale’s been told and gone on its way.

What a bad journey it’s taken today!

*Told by Anna Maltese and collected by Salvatore Struppa, librarian of the Community of Marsala.*

## 136. THE OLD PEOPLE

**I**t’s been told time and again that there was once an old man and woman. The old woman sat down to eat at noon and said, “The bread’s not going down.”

“Well then,” said the old man, “I’ll go and buy some sausages.”

So, he went and bought two sausages. One was to be eaten right then and there, and the other he hung up to be cooked later. After he cooked and ate one of the sausages, he went to visit his neighbor. Well, a little mouse was living in the old woman’s house, and it appeared and said, “Now’s the time for me to go and eat the sausage.”

Meanwhile the cat smelled the mouse and said, “Now’s the best time for me to eat that little mouse.”

But the old woman saw the cat and the mouse, and when she got to them,

she cried out, “May I die! The mouse is eating the sausage, and the cat’s eating the mouse!”

And she started to pull the cat and got stuck to it. Just then the old man arrived. “May I die! My wife’s stuck to the cat! What should I do?”

And the old man went over to his wife, pulled, and got stuck to her. Some time passed, and many soldiers passed by their house. Then the neighbor yelled out, “Come and pull the old people stuck to their cat!”

The soldiers came running to pull the old couple from the cat, and they, too, got stuck!<sup>169</sup> Soon after a king and queen passed by, and the neighbor yelled to them, “Come and pull the old people. They’re stuck to their cat!”

So the king and queen went and pulled and pulled, but they, too, got stuck. Finally, the devil passed by, and the king and queen said, “Come and pull us off!”

The devil tugged at them, but he wasn’t able to pull them off and got stuck as well.

So now the little mouse shat into the mouth of the cat, the cat shat into the mouth of the old woman, the old woman shat into the mouth of the old man, the old man shat into the mouth of the soldiers, the soldiers shat into the mouth of the queen, the queen shat into the mouth of the king, the king shat into the mouth of the devil, and the devil shat . . .

“Into whose mouth?”<sup>170</sup>

“Why, into yours!”

And that’s the end of the story!

*Collected in Erice.*

## 137. PARRINEDDU<sup>171</sup>

**I**t’s been told time and again that there was once a mother with three children. One was called Cocolidda,<sup>172</sup> the second, Parrineddu, and the third, Siggitedda.<sup>173</sup>

169 The narrator raised her arms obliquely to show how the soldiers got stuck.

170 Pitrè remarked that this was the question asked by someone who was present and is called the “guarantee” (*pregiuu*). This is the person who must be there to ask the right question and to guarantee to the rest of the listeners that the tale will have the appropriate effect. The young girl who told this story to Pitrè warned him: “When you tell this story in Palermo, make sure you have a guarantee (*pregiuu*) among your listeners in advance.”

171 In Sicilian, *Parrineddu* means little priest.

172 Connotes little coconut or daffiness.

173 Connotes little chair or laziness.

One day the mother said, "Siggitedda, Siggitedda, sweep the house!"

"Mama, I'm collapsing."

"Coculidda, Coculidda, sweep the house!"

"Mama, I'm all worn out!"

And so the mother cried out, "Parrineddu, Parrineddu, sweep the house."

"Of course, mama, I'll do it right now."

As he was sweeping, he discovered seven coins.

"What can I buy with these coins?" he asked himself. "If I buy seven coins' worth of almonds, I'll have to crack the shells. If I buy seven coins' worth of walnuts, I'll have to crack the shells. It's best if I buy some sausages."

So he bought the sausages, and he gave some<sup>174</sup> to his mother, some<sup>175</sup> to Coculidda, and some part<sup>176</sup> to Siggitedda. And some he kept for himself.

"And who had the most?"

"Parrineddu."

"Go stick your nose in the piss pot!"<sup>177</sup>

*Told by Maria Curatolo in Erice.*

## 138. THE TREASURE

Once upon a time there was a prince who studied very hard and racked his brains because he wanted to learn magic and the art of finding treasures. One day he discovered a treasure in a bank, let's say the Bank of Ddisisa.

"Oh," he said, "now I'll get it out."

But in order to get it out, it was necessary that ten millions and more of ants had to cross the river of Gianquadrada (let's say this was the river) one by one in a bark which was half a nutshell. The prince put the bark in the river, and the ants began to cross the river. One, two, three . . . and they kept on crossing and are still doing it to this day.<sup>178</sup>

*Told by Nina Fedele to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

174 The storyteller accompanied this word with a gesture of the left index finger that this was a very small part.

175 Gesture with the entire finger signifying a quantity equal to that finger.

176 Gesture with the entire left arm, a brusque gesture that is meant to be derisory and funny.

177 The entire tale finishes with a joke on all the listeners to the story. After the storyteller, Maria Curatolo, told the tale and said that the major part of the sausage went to Parrineddu, she asked. "Who received the most?" Naturally one of the listeners said, "Parrineddu." And the storyteller responded with: "Stick your nose in the pisspot!" The word "pisspot" (*cantareddu*) rhymes with parrineddu, which gives a sharp point to the humour.

178 Whoever tells this tale stops here and says: "We will finish this tale when the ants have finished crossing the river."

## 139. THE RIDDLE

There were once three brothers, so it's been told time and again, and they had six rifles, three that fired and three that had no triggers. When they went into a forest to hunt, they took a path that broke off, and there was no longer a path. They carried three game bags on their backs and three good sacks, three that were without strings and couldn't be tied, and three that were without bottoms. They called three dogs to come to them, two were lame and one without sound feet. So the dogs joined them in the forest, and the hunt began.

"You take that one! Grab that one! That's yours over there!" they all cried out.

They caught four rabbits. Three escaped, and one slipped out of their hands. Once they reached a plain, they saw a house without roof and walls, and there was a beautiful lady who didn't live there, neither in the day nor in the night.

"Let's get a move on, good lady," the three brothers said. "Prepare these four rabbits for us."

"Well, I've got three pans, one broken and three without bottoms. I've got a good oven without fire and without flames. For water and wine there's a cistern that's empty in the summer and dry in the winter."

"That's fine, beautiful lady, prepare the meat with good cheer because we are going to pay you with coins that ring. We have eight little sacks, four with holes in them and filled with air, and four without bottoms."


While the lady was preparing the meat, she felt a great pain at the soles of her feet.

"Oww, I'm dying! I'm dying!"

"It's all right, good lady. It's really nothing. We'll go to that spot in the ground where we saw dead a body that's been there for fifty days. We'll take a piece of the body, paste it on the soles of your feet, and the pain will be gone in seconds."

*Told by Ninfa Lobaido to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*


## 140. KING RIDICULOUS

nce upon a time there was a ridiculous king named Cookie-and-Cream.<sup>179</sup> Well, this ridiculous king had a daughter, whom he named Princess Delicious-Cookie-and-Cream. And Princess Delicious-Cookie-and-Cream had a bird named Beak-Cookie-and-Cream. But one day, Beak-Cookie-and Cream flew away, causing the king to issue a proclamation: “Whoever captures the bird, Beak-Cookie-and-Cream, can have my daughter, Princess Delicious-Cookie-and-Cream, for his bride.” Well, along came the slob, Drooling-Cookie-and-Cream, and he managed to capture Beak-Cookie-and-Cream. Then he carried the bird to the king and said, “Your majesty, ridiculous King Cookie-and-Cream, here is the bird, Beak-Cookie-and-Cream. Now give me your daughter, Princess Delicious-Cookie-and-Cream.”

“Get out of here, you slob, Drooling-Cookie-and-Cream! How dare you ask for my daughter, Princess Delicious-Cookie-and-Cream?!”<sup>180</sup>

*Collected by Pitрэ in Palermo.*

## 141. THE TALE ABOUT THE BARBER

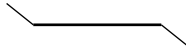
nce upon a time there was a tale told time and again about a barber . . . Behave yourselves, and I’ll tell it to you again.

*Collected by Pitрэ in Borgetto.*

179 The Sicilian name for the king is *lu re-befè-viscotta-e-minnè*, which literally means king-ridiculous-biscuit-nipple. Since it is virtually impossible to capture the sense of this nonsense, we have freely translated the king’s name and the other names in this tale that was supposed to delight children.

180 Pitрэ notes that the storyteller can keep extending the tale as long as the children behave.

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# Tall Tales and Anecdotes



## 142. THE PRINCE'S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

**H**ere's a tale they like to tell. Once upon a time there was a rich prince with a son, and he was very friendly with a Jesuit priest. And so, when this prince fell ill, the Jesuits came to visit him. Seeing that he was in danger of dying, they said to him,

"Prince, you should make your will and testament, and if you want to benefit your soul, you'll leave all your inheritance to the Church."

"I'll agree to that," said the prince.

So they called the notary and two witnesses, and they quickly had him draw up his will. Since the prince was in very weak condition and barely conscious, the Jesuits were able to dictate the will, which would leave the son with nothing at all.

Now, there was a master shoemaker in the house, and he overheard the whole discussion about the will. So he called the son and said to him,

"It seems your father has left everything to the Jesuits, and you'll be a pauper and in a sorry state."

"I understand," said the son, "but what can I do about it?"

"Just leave everything to me," said the shoemaker.

And so, after the Jesuits had made the will and left, the prince's son and the shoemaker had a little conference.

"Here's my plan," said the shoemaker. "We'll remove your father from his bed, and I'll put on his clothes and take his place. Then you call the notary and say, 'My father still needs to make his will.'"

So the notary was summoned, and the shoemaker, imitating the prince's voice, said to him, "Notary, please write as follows. I annul the will that I made with the Jesuit fathers, and I am leaving two thousand gold pieces to the master shoemaker who is in my house. I'm also leaving the rest of my inheritance to my son so that he can see to my funeral and burial."

After the notary departed, the master shoemaker got up from bed, and they put the prince back. Later on they transferred him to a coffin, carried out the funeral procession, and buried him. As soon as the three days' mourning period was over, the Jesuit fathers returned to the prince's house. When they saw the son, they said to him,

"You realize that your father made a will that left everything to the holy Church. So you'd better leave, since we are now the masters of the house."

"Oh, no, holy fathers," replied the prince's son, "you are wrong, and here is

my father's will to prove it. So it's you who must leave, or I'll have to send you out with kicks and fling you headlong down the stairs!"

He opened the will that the shoemaker had made in the guise of the prince, and the Jesuits saw all their gains vanish. And that's how the master shoemaker saw to it that the prince's son got his rightful inheritance from his father.

*Told by Vincenzo Midulla to G. di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

### 143. TÌPPITI NNÀPPITI

Once there was a rich bourgeois gentleman who liked to ride around in a carriage. When one of his servants happened to leave, he went to find a man to replace him.

"Will you come work for me?" he asked the man.

"Of course, master, gladly."

"All right then, walk along to my house, and I'll teach you how we run our household."

When they got there, the master of the house rang the bell and the mistress answered.

"What do you call this person?" the master asked the servant.

" 'Mistress' is what I'd call her," he answered.

"You oaf, would you really call her 'mistress'?"

"How else should I call her?"

" 'My Glory' is what I call her."

"All right, master, I'll call her 'my Glory.' "

"No, you fool! She's *my* Glory, not yours!"

"All right, master, then it's 'your Glory' that I'll call her."

Next they went into the bedroom, and found a bed nicely made up.

"And what do you call this?" asked the master.

" 'The bed,' master."

"Not 'the bed,' you idiot! Don't you know anything? This is called 'the reposer.' "

"All right, 'the reposer.' "

Now underneath the bed there were some slippers, and the master asked, "And what do you call these?"

"Slippers," came the answer.

"Not 'slippers,' you uncouth fellow—we call these 'sabots.' "

Then they came to the chairs.

“And these, what would you call these items?”

“Chairs.”

“Not at all, you simpleton! We call these ‘impeders.’ ” (Since they impede us when we encounter them during the night.)<sup>181</sup>

From there they passed into the kitchen. A cat was sitting on top of the hearth, and the master asked,

“What do you call this?”

“A cat,” the man replied.

“Oh, blessed Mary of Carmen!” exclaimed the master. “It astonishes me that you think yourself fit to do service in my home! How could you possibly think this is called a cat, when its real name is ‘tìppiti nnàppiti?’”

Then they came to the lantern.

“And what would you call this?”

“A lantern, or a lamp.”

“Is that what you’d call it? No, it’s a ‘cheer-the-folk.’ ”

Then he showed him the water faucet.

“And what do you call this?”

“Water.”

“You’d really say ‘water?’”

“Yes, what else?”

“Its name is, ‘abundance.’ ”

Then they went into the room where linen was kept.

“What do you call this?”

“Linen.”

“ ‘Linen’? Of course not. It’s called ‘people-dress.’ ”

Then the master said to him, “Now get ready to spend the night here. If I call you, I expect you to know the right name for everything, is that clear?”

“Yes, master!”

Now, the fact was that the lady of the house had reached the end of her endurance with this husband of hers. So she called the servant aside and made him a proposition.

“Are you brave enough to do what it takes to get rid of this husband of mine? Afterwards, the two of us can get married.”

“Sure thing, my lady,” he replied. “Just leave everything to me.”

So that night, once the master was sound asleep, the servant threw a lighted match into the room where the linen was, put all the chairs in the middle of living room, and then began shouting outside the master’s bedroom, which adjoined the room with the burning linen.

181 This is the narrator’s explanation, put in parentheses by Pitriè.

“Arise, master, arise! Come out of your reposer, put on your sabots, but watch out for the impeder! Tippi ti nnàppiti (and this is where the story gets its name)<sup>182</sup> overturned the cheer-the-folk and dragged it into the middle of the people-dress, and if you don’t run and get the abundance, you can kiss all your possessions goodbye!”

“Who is it! What is he saying?” exclaimed the startled husband.

“The servant,” said his wife, “is telling you to get out of bed, put on your slippers, and watch out for the chairs. The cat got hold of the lantern and dragged it into the linen, and if you don’t run and fetch water, all your possessions are lost!”

Her husband jumped out of bed in a fright and ran to the door, but the servant had closed it tight with three loops of chains, and so the master burned to death. The mistress and the servant got married and became man and wife, and so ends my story of tippi ti nnàppiti.

*Collected by the schoolteacher Giuseppe-Vincenzo Marotta in Cerda.*

## 144. THE FOUR NUMSKULLS<sup>183</sup>

Once upon a time there were four numskulls who decided to go into business together because they felt they had expert knowledge. The first one—let’s call him Paul—began by saying,

“I’m going to set up all the casks that my father left to me, so we can go into business as wine dealers. We’ll buy muscat grapes and sweet wine, and also vinegar and harsh wine, and then if we mix them together, we’ll get a wine that’s just right. And if by some bad luck it got ruined, we could simply let it all dry out in the sun and sell off the dregs.”

Then up spoke the second numskull, and said,

“My advice to you is to buy heavy wood, big pieces of timber, branches, hard wood of all kinds, and we can bring them all to my beautiful furnace, the great one that my grandfather built. Then we’ll set it on fire and let it burn at a slow flame for a long time, so that we get perfect ashes, the best quality ash you could find, and we’ll sell it for a high price and our business will prosper.”

Then the third numskull said, “No, a better business would be to buy cows,

<sup>182</sup> This is the narrator’s explanation.

<sup>183</sup> Here and in subsequent tales, we have used “numskull” or “fool” to translate the word *minchiuni*. But *minchiuni* has a sharper, and untranslatable, pejorative sense in Sicilian, since it derives from *minchia*, the colloquial word for penis. An English slang equivalent of *minchiuni* might be “dumb prick.”

and when they give birth, we can slaughter the calves. If we feed the mothers on honeycombs, they will give the sweetest tasting milk you ever saw, which we can export. We'll put it on ships and send it to the most faraway lands, because they are the wealthiest, and that's the fastest way for us to get rich. . . ."<sup>184</sup>

"And the fourth numskull. . . .?"<sup>185</sup>

The fourth numskull is . . . you! Now you tell us *your* plan!  
Told by Nina Fedele to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.

## 145. THE THREE NUMSKULLS OF PALERMO

Once upon a time in Palermo, there were three numskulls who were fighting over which one of them was the biggest fool of all. Whoever won the contest was to be rewarded with an old worn-out coat they had found, and each one wanted it. As they were fighting, along came a man from out of town, who asked,

"What's the problem, friends? Why are you hitting one another?"

"We've found a coat," one of them replied, "and whichever of us is the biggest fool here gets to keep it. And I say it's mine because I'm the biggest fool!"

"No you're not," said another. "I'm a bigger fool than you!"

"Not at all," exclaimed the third. "I'm the biggest fool of all, and that coat belongs to me!"

"All right," said the man, "here's a way to settle the question. Let me hold the coat, and we'll have a session in which each of you tells a story about something you've done. Whoever has done the stupidest thing is the one who gets the coat."

They all agreed, and decided to hold the session the following day. When they all came together again, the first numskull began.

Gentlemen, once when I was at home, I brought my mother a basket of figs as a present. My mother decided to give them as a present to somebody else, so she wouldn't allow me to eat even one of them. But then God intervened.

184 At this point, Pitrè notes, the narrator pauses as if distracted, and waits for one of the listeners to ask about the fourth numskull.

185 This voice represents a member of the audience speaking, and the tale concludes with the narrator's mocking response.

The church bell rang and my mother left to go to mass. The instant she was out the door, I ran to the basket and began eating figs. But my bad luck was that she soon returned to get the rosary she had left behind. Well, there I was with two figs in my mouth, and so to keep her from realizing that I was eating figs, I decided not to speak. But she had to ask where her rosary was, and who else could she ask but me? Since I couldn't speak, I just kept going "Mmuh! Mmuh!" My mother got upset that I had lost my speech, and when she saw how puffed out my cheeks were and touched them and felt the swelling, she cried, "O my son, what's wrong?" But all I could answer was, "Mmuh! Mmuh!"

In her desperation, my mother called the surgeons, saying, "Come quickly and save my son—he's dying from swollen cheeks." And the surgeons came at once to study my cheeks, which by now were all bloated and mushy (because a fig is mushy, you see).

"We must cut right away!" they exclaimed. "It's ready to burst!" And so they cut open my cheeks, and out popped the figs. Well, when my mother saw that it was figs squirting out of my mouth, she went after me with a cudgel and gave me a sound thrashing.

And that's how my being a fool and a major numskull caused me to have bruises all over my face!

"Hooray for the great numskull that you are! Hooray!" they all shouted, singing the praises of this fellow as a first-class numskull.

Now let's hear the second numskull's story.

Gentlemen, you should know that I was a young man with a sweetheart, and every morning I used to go under her window to look at her. Well, one time I was watching her intently, not wanting to let her out of my sight for fear I wouldn't get to see her again, and suddenly, water came pouring down on top of me. You gentlemen know how these village houses have long gutters, and often the water comes pouring down from them. Well, one of those gutters kept sending water that hit me right in the eye, but I was so determined not to lose sight of my beloved that I stood there without moving. That water kept hitting me in the eye for so long that it finally gouged out my eye and turned me into an object of pity. And once my sweetheart saw that I was a one-eyed man, she wanted nothing more to do with me. And so I am such a great numskull that I ended up without either a sweetheart or an eye.

"Hooray for the biggest numskull on earth! Hooray for the biggest numskull on earth!" everyone shouted.

And now let's go to the third numskull.

Good gentlemen, you should know that I was a young man with a sweetheart, and one day she noticed that my shoes were really shabby. This was because no shoemaker was willing to make good shoes for me, since I had terribly shaped feet.

"I will take you as my husband," she said, "on the day that you get shoes that look good on you, and you have the best shoes on the avenue."

So I immediately went down to the Four Corners, turned onto the main avenue, the Casseru,<sup>186</sup> and began studying the window displays of all the shoe stores, hoping to find a really good pair of shoes. I saw a pair that were really elegant, beautifully made and with a well-shaped heel, and I said to myself, "When I'm wearing shoes like these, my sweetheart will certainly desire me, since I'll look like a dashing handsome fellow!" And so I turned to the owner of the shop and said,

"Sir, I'd like this pair of shoes."

"Oh, you poor young man," he replied, "how could shoes like this ever fit you? You have a foot the size of a plow."

"No matter," I answered. "Just let me have this pair of shoes. I'll pay you whatever the price is."

"I wish you'd stop pestering me and leave my store," said the owner. "To get these shoes to fit, you'd have to cut off half your foot!"

And would you believe it? For the love of my sweetheart, I had half my foot cut off, and then the shoe fit me. But in the end I lost half my foot and my sweetheart as well, because she didn't want me any longer.

At that point the man from out of town said, "Gentlemen, I really can't say which of you three is the greatest numskull. If we added a fourth, and put two on each side, the balance would be so perfect that it couldn't tip either way!"

*Collected in Borgetto from the countryman Vincenzo Rappa.*

186 The Four Corners (i Quattro Cantì) is the major intersection in the center of Palermo. The main avenue, once called the Càsseru, is now Via Vittorio Emanuele.

## 146. THREE CLEVER PALERMITANS

Once there were three Palermitans, who went for a walk outside of Palermo together with some friends who were country folk. Eventually they got separated from the country folk and had to go looking for them, and as they walked along, they saw a threshing area where a group of haystacks had been erected.

"Here's a village where we can ask if anyone has seen our companions," they said.

And so they went up to the haystacks and began calling to the inhabitants. But of course, the inhabitants didn't answer—who would be answering from inside a haystack? Then the Palermitans went all around the haystacks, looking for a doorway or window. When they couldn't find any doors or windows, they decided that this must be a village of robbers, where people had to live without doors or windows. Consequently, they began to flee, looking back over their shoulders in fear that the robbers might be after them.

They ran until they finally saw their friends, and in their fear they called out to them, "Help friends, help! The robbers are after us!"

Their friends were upset to see them in such a state and asked them to show them where this village of robbers was, so they could pay them back for having frightened their city friends. So the Palermitans led the others back to the "haystack village." When they got there, they pointed to it in fright and cried out, "This is the robbers' village!"

The Palermitans insisted that these were walled houses, but the country folk had to laugh, and said to them,

"You city-dwellers can't even tell the difference between a bunch of straw haystacks and a real town!"

*Collected from Vincenzo Rappa in Borgetto.*

## 147. THE PEDDLER FROM PALERMO

Once there was a peddler from Palermo, so it's been told time and again, and he was one of those who went from the city to the neighboring villages with a cartload of old pots and pans and kitchenware he hoped to sell.

Well, this peddler happened to be in Alcamo, where he was well known because he gave out numbers for the lotto game, and everyone played it. Now,

in Alcamo there was also a certain villager, a poor but very honest man, who felt frustrated to the point of banging his head against a wall, because it was already November, with the season for planting seeds almost over, and no rain had fallen yet.

"What am I supposed to do?" he said. "I still have my seeds to plant, but the sky has continued to remain as dry as if it were July!"

As he pondered his problem, he recalled that there was this peddler, who had arrived from Palermo, and he said to himself, "This fellow knows the numbers, so maybe he also knows when it's supposed to rain. I think I'll go see him."

So he went to the peddler and asked,

"My friend, can you tell me when it's going to rain?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because if it doesn't rain, I can't plant my seeds."

"Well, I can tell you, my friend, but first you have to do me a favor."

"Certainly."

"Do you have a mule?"

"I do."

"Then carry this load of pots and pans as far as Corleone, and I'll tell you when it's going to rain, and you can take care of your planting."

"What a good plan!" said the man from Alcamo. "How soon can we leave?"

"We'll leave tomorrow."

And so early the next morning the villager from Alcamo loaded his mule with two great sacks filled with the pots and pans, and they took to the road. As they were going along, the villager kept questioning the peddler about when the rain would come, but the peddler would answer, "Don't worry. I'll tell you when we reach Corleone."

Well, it was God's will that they finally reached Corleone. The man from Alcamo had been waiting for this moment, and the minute they entered the town he asked,

"All right, my friend, now tell me when it's going to rain."

The peddler, seeing that they had reached Corleone, burst out laughing and recited,

"Rain will follow after thunder,  
If not in this year, then in another."<sup>187</sup>

The man from Alcamo was not as stupid as he looked. He was quick to

187 *Truniannu truniannu, s'un chiovi aguannu, chiovi n'atr'annu*. Pitrè notes that this derives from the well-known proverb, *Truniannu truniannu chioviri voli*, "thundering and thundering it wants to rain."

answer this swindler with the following words. “Oh, if that’s how it is, then,


Pans intact and pans that are broken,  
In the public square of Corleone,  
Go fish them out of the general mess.”

And as he said this, he untied the cord that held the two sacks and *whoosh!*—all the kitchenware was on the ground and dented and smashed to bits. Then he turned around to start back to Alcamo. Meanwhile the poor peddler, who had thought himself so clever, was left standing like a fool in the middle of the square, with the mess all around him and tears in his eyes. The one who had set out to play a trick ended up the victim. That’s because the Palermitans, once they get out into the villages, always end up looking like fools.

A story written, a story told,  
Now tell me yours, since mine is old.<sup>188</sup>

*Told by Vito Vitale to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 148. THE RUSTIC FROM LARCARA

nce upon a time, good gentlemen, in Larcara, there were two women who were good friends, one with a son and the other with a daughter.

Well, one day the son got the notion to marry.

“Mother,” he said, “I want to take a wife.”

“All right, then,” replied the mother, “go to our good friend Rosa and ask for her daughter’s hand.”

So the young man went and presented himself as a suitor. The dowry was agreed upon as four handfuls of grain and a mattress of hemp.

A few days later this young man heard someone shouting loudly, “Oh, Jesus, help me! My little child has fallen down the well!”

When he went running to help, he discovered it was his intended mother-in-law, who was tearing her hair in distress.

“Where did your child fall down the well?” he asked.

“Oh, nothing really happened,” the woman replied. “I was only thinking

188 This neat couplet concludes several tales: *Favula ditta, favula scritta, Dicit la vostra ca la mia è ditta*.

that my daughter will eventually give birth to a child, and then I imagined that this child had fallen down our well.”

“Oh, what a stupid creature!” he thought to himself. “ ‘Not yet born, and she’s calling him Nick!’<sup>189</sup> And I’m supposed to get married in this place? Not on your life! I’m leaving!”

Upon saying this, the young fellow left that village and soon came to a neighboring village where he heard someone crying.

“Oh, Jesus, help! My poor son has got his hand caught!”

So he went closer and saw a young boy who was playing with hazelnuts and had gotten his hand caught in the furrow.<sup>190</sup> He had grasped a handful of the nuts inside the furrow, but because he kept his fist clenched, he was unable to pull his hand out of the narrow space. Now his mother began shouting, “Oh, my poor boy, they’ll have to cut his hand off to free him!”

The young man turned to the woman and asked,

“How much will you give me if I can cure him myself?”

“Oh, please, you can have whatever you like. Here, take these ten gold pieces.”

The young man took them and then turned to the boy.

“Drop four nuts, and I’ll give you eight,” he said.

So the boy dropped four nuts, but his hand still remained stuck.

“Drop another eight, and I’ll give you sixteen!”

When the boy dropped eight nuts, he was able to remove his hand.

“What a terrific doctor!” the boy’s mother exclaimed.

But all the young man could think was, “How could I possibly get married in a place like this? Not for me! I’m leaving!”

And so he set forth once again and traveled until he reached another town, where he saw a large crowd gathered in front of the church. There was a woman all dressed up in fancy clothing who was supposed to be getting married. But because she was exceptionally tall and had her hair piled high in an elaborate hairdo, she could not enter through the church door. Her mother was weeping, because her daughter would not be able to get married and would be forced to remain a spinster.

The young man approached and asked the mother, “How much will you give me if I can get her married?”

“Ten gold pieces!” she replied.

189 Pitre explains that this is a very common proverb (*ancora ’un è natu e si chiama Cola!*) for describing a future possibility that people foolishly assume as a certainty.

190 We are to imagine a game where nuts are placed in a narrow hole or furrow in the ground and pulled out by the fistful.

So he said to the bride, "Bend down your head."

"I can't," she replied, "or I'll mess up my hairdo."

"Bend down, I said!" And as he spoke these words, the young man gave her a punch in the stomach, making her bend forward, and so she was able to enter the church.

"Oh, my, what a terrific doctor he is!" they shouted, and the mother gave him the ten gold pieces.

But as the young man left the church, he again said to himself that this was hardly the place to find a bride. And so he continued walking until he came to yet another town. Arriving before dawn, he stopped to rest outside the door of a warehouse. He heard talking inside, and so he looked through the key-hole and saw that the storeroom was filled with big boxes, and on top of them sat a woman who was spinning. When the woman dropped her spindle, she called out, "Antonuzzu, Antonuzzu, fetch my spindle for me, and I'll give you a handful of fava beans."

Antonuzzu was the name of a pig she kept,<sup>191</sup> and it responded by grunting, "Uh, uh!"

Well, the woman kept calling and Antonuzzu kept answering, "Uh, uh!", until finally the woman had to climb down.

"So, you refuse to fetch it for me?" she said. "Then may your mother drop dead on the spot!"

When the young man from Larcara heard all of this, he quickly got out a piece of paper and folded it like a letter. Then he knocked at the door.

"Who's there?" asked the woman.

"Open up, please! I'm delivering a letter from Antonuzzu's mother, who has fallen seriously ill and wants to see her son before she dies."

"Oh, my God, my curse is already taking effect!"

After saying this, she got a mule, strapped the pig on its back, and gave the young man six handkerchiefs for drying the pig's tears at his mother's death, a cloak for the pig to wear at the funeral, and oil, flour, cheese, and ten gold pieces for the family meal following the funeral of the pig's mother.<sup>192</sup> Then she gave the pig a big kiss and sent him on his way.

The young man was delighted to have all these possessions, and he returned to his own village. When his mother saw all that he had brought back with

191 Pitрэ notes that Antoniu or Antonuzzu was a customary name to give to pigs, because the people viewed St. Anthony as the protector of these animals.

192 The Sicilian reads: *lu cunsulatu a la morti di la matri*. *Cunsulatu* (or *cunsulu*) was the name for the meal organized by family and close friends after the death of a family member, a consoling event, as its name implies.

him, she wanted to hear what had happened since he left Larcara, and he told her everything. Then he added, “Now I’ve seen that people everywhere else are even more foolish than they are here. So, you can go to good friend Rosa and tell her I’ll marry her daughter.”

His mother did that, and the wedding was arranged.

The morning after they were married, the groom got up and went out to buy some meat. When he came back with the meat, it had a bone in it.

“Here it is,” he said to his wife.

“How am I supposed to cook it?” she asked.

“Don’t you know?”

“I have no idea.”

“Then just stick it up your ass!” he replied angrily, and left the house.

His words made his wife burst into tears. “Oh, my lord Jesus,” she exclaimed, “what an awful thing! How am I supposed to stick this meat up my ass?”

And she continued to cry long and loud just as her mother arrived, intending to wish the newlyweds a happy first morning. But when she heard what had happened, she too burst into tears. “Oh, Jesus, what an awful thing to say to my daughter!”

As she was crying like this, the girl’s father arrived. When he heard the whole story, his response was, “All right then, it seems to be God’s will that you two have to stick the meat up your ass, and I’ll take the bone and stick it up mine.”

And that’s what the three of them did.

Well, the poor man cried and screamed and was in so much pain that his eyes began to pop out of his head. In the midst of all this yelling and screaming, the young man returned and entered the house. When he took in the scene, he picked up a stick and gave meaty whacks<sup>193</sup> to all three of them.

This is what country people are like!

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

193 There is an untranslatable pun here, since the Sicilian says *cci detti la carni a tutti tri*, “he gave all three of them the meat.” The idiom “give the meat” means “give a beating,” but here it also refers back to the real meat he has given them.

## 149. THE MAN FROM LARCARA

**W**ell, gentlemen, you've got to realize that people from Larcara are the way the good Lord made them—sometimes they don't even know that you have to put bread in your mouth in order to eat it. In the old days they were all like that, even if it's less so today.

So, let me tell you about a man from Larcara who once went to Naples. And what would you expect? When this simple, inexperienced fellow saw that sprawling city with its great long streets and all the carriages and voices and the general hubbub, he thought he had arrived in Hell, and he immediately wanted to go home.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed. "Is this the famous city of Naples? Who could ever survive this? Whoever likes this sort of city can come and stay here, but not me!"

And he headed back to Sicily.

Well, his boat sailed at night, and since a cold wind kept chilling him to the bone, this poor fellow from Larcara couldn't stop his teeth from chattering. So, he tried curling himself up in a ball, but it made no difference. The north wind kept hitting him in the face and he was miserable.

The boat sailed on, until finally the harbor of Palermo came into view. When the man from Larcara could make out distant lights on the hills, his spirits revived. He stretched out his hands as if to warm them, and exclaimed, "Ah! It feels so good finally to have some heat!"

Yes, there are lots and lots of stories like this that are told about the folk from Larcara. They even created an expression, as when you say to someone, "And where are you from, Larcara?"

A story long and a story brief,

Now you tell yours, since mine is complete.<sup>194</sup>

*Told by the young laundress, Giuseppa Giambrone, to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

194 "Favula longa e favula curta,  
Dicit la vostra ca la mia è tutta.

## 150. THE MAN FROM PARTANNA

Once there was a villager from Partanna who went out into the countryside to do some pruning. While he was doing the pruning, he noticed a large, handsome tree that had begun to wither. “Who else but me is here to do this?” he thought. “I’d better prune it right now.”

So he took his axe, climbed up the tree, and began furiously chopping the trunk of the tree. He was above, seated on a branch, and was hacking at the part below him.

Along came one of the men working nearby, and he said to him, “My good friend, don’t you realize that if you succeed in cutting through the trunk, you’ll end up on the ground with a broken neck?”

“Oh, no,” replied the man from Partanna, “there’s no way that can happen.” And he kept on hacking away with his axe.

When he was least expecting it, the trunk gave way, the tree came down, and the man hit the ground with his whole body.

“That fellow was telling the truth,” he said. “He was a prophet! And now here I am, dying, yes dying! I’m already dead! Carry me back home for burial.” And with these words he stretched out full length on the ground.

Well, a few local villagers happened to be present, all of them from Partanna. “Oh, our poor neighbor Vito is dead!” they exclaimed. And so they lifted him up, put him on a ladder, and began carrying him back to his village.

As they made their way back, they got stuck in a ravine and couldn’t find their way out.

“How do we get out of here?” they kept asking. “Which way should we turn to find our way out?”

“Oh, poor us!”

They kept complaining like this, until finally they came to a complete halt. At this point the dead man, seeing their total confusion, raised himself up on the ladder.

“When I was alive,” he said, “I always used the path on the right to find my way out.”

And then he dropped back down again as if dead. Meanwhile, the rest of the men—perfect fools that they were—took the path he had indicated and carried him as a corpse all the way back to Partanna.

Now, do you see how clever the people of Partanna are?

*Told by Antonio Loria, nicknamed Bònchiaro, in Salaparuta.*

151. THE PEASANT FROM CAPACI<sup>195</sup>

There was once a peasant, a Capaciano, who came down from Capaci with an ass loaded with long straw.<sup>196</sup> Near Sampolo<sup>197</sup> which was frequented by rogues and thieves, two of them saw the peasant approaching from a distance and said, "Well, we know where our next meal is coming from today!"

The two of them headed toward the peasant and got behind the ass. One of them grabbed hold of the reins with one hand, and with the other he took off the halter and slipped it over himself. Then the second thief made off with the ass and the straw. Meanwhile the poor Capaciano kept walking with his hands behind him holding the reins and with his head to the ground, and he would yell, "Straw for sale!"

Every now and then he stopped, and it didn't bother the thief to walk behind him wearing the halter and to be pulled by the peasant. After a while the Capaciano gave a tug on the reins, turned around and saw that, instead of the ass carrying the straw, there was a man standing there.

"Where's the ass?" he cried out.

"I'm the ass," responded the thief.

"How can you be the ass?"

"I've got to tell you, master," the thief began to explain, "that thirty years ago I committed a huge, huge, huge sin and was condemned to be an ass for thirty years. I've had many owners, and now you've become my master. But today is the last day of my sentence. The thirty years are up, and I've become human once more!"

"Well, now you're a human?" the Capaciano said. "Excuse me, my brother, for all the bad ways I've treated you." And he continued to apologize for all the beatings he had given him. Then he said, "You know what I've been thinking, brother? Let's go back to my village and celebrate for four days to make up for all the bad times in the past."

So they returned to Capaci, and the peasant told his wife what had happened. On the one hand, his wife was displeased because she had lost the ass, but on the other, she was happy that the ass had become human. So they ate,

195 Pitrè wrote that this tale is a satire about the thick heads and the clumsiness of people from the community of Capaci.

196 It was common for the peasants of Capaci to come down to Palermo to sell straw for horses, flax for mattresses, vegetables, olives etc. They would go through the streets shouting: "Straw for sale!" "Flax!" "I've got fresh asparagus from the mountains!"

197 A district of Palermo.

drank, and feasted for many days. When the time seemed right, the thief asked permission to leave because he had to return to his wife and children. The peasant began to weep, but then he pressed twelve coins into his hand and bid him farewell.

So, off went the thief to find his companion, and when he found him, he told him what had happened, and they went to a market to sell the ass.

Now, let's leave them where they are and turn to the Capaciano. Well, the poor peasant wasn't able to earn a living without the ass. So he took jobs here and there, and as soon as he had finally scraped up enough money, he went down to Palermo and headed to the fair of St. Gristina at Alivuzza to buy a new ass. It so happened that the thieves had sold his ass to a merchant who had a stand at the fair. As the Capaciano was browsing at the fair, the ass started to smell the scent of his master, perked its ears, and began kicking with its feet. The peasant recognized the ass and cried out, "Ah, you poor thing! You've become an ass again! What other huge, huge sin did you commit? Do you think that I'll buy you once again? No, not on your life, you poor thing!"

*Told by Francesca Deodata in Palermo.*

## 152. THE SIMPLETON FROM CALABRIA

**I**t's been told that there was a man from Casteltermini who was a soldier, and he went to Calabria where he became friends with a Calabrian. Since the soldier was very smart, he made a good deal of money. When it was time to return to his home, he took his leave from his friend from Calabria, and he returned to Casteltermini, where he opened a shop with the money he had earned. It was a nice grocery shop stocked full with salami, wine, vegetables, and fruit. While he led a comfortable life, the fortunes of his friend from Calabria had declined.

Now, one day the man from Calabria said to himself, "I think I'll go and look up my friend in Casteltermini."

When he arrived at Casteltermini, he found his friend in a beautiful shop with many provisions, and he was astounded by such wealth.

"My friend," he said, "how did you become so rich?"

"It's this way, my friend," the Casteltermian responded, "I bought myself some good judgment, and I became rich using it."

"Oh friend," the Calabrian responded, "will you do me a favor and let me buy some of this good judgment?"

"But my friend, do you have enough money?

"How much do you want?"

"You'll need twelve gold coins."

"I have the money at home. Just wait. I'll return to Calabria, get the money, and come back to Casteltermini."

The Calabrian returned to Calabria, went to his house, got the money and returned to Casteltermini. Once there, he went to his friend and said, "My friend, I brought the twelve gold coins with me and want to buy some good judgment right away."

"Of course, my friend."

So the Casteltermian went to a rogue named Filippo and said, "We can swindle twelve gold coins from a Calabrian and eat the simpleton alive."

"What do we have to do?"

"Listen to what I tell you: get a large mouse, and then do what I tell you."

After telling Filippo the plan, the friend went back to the Calabrian and then took him to Filippo to arrange everything. When they arrived, Filippo said that fourteen gold coins were necessary if he wanted to get true judgment.

"What!" the Calabrian said. "I'm giving you twelve gold coins, and that's it!"

To be brief, they agreed on twelve gold coins, and Filippo took the mouse, put it on top of the Calabrian's head beneath his hat, and said,

"You're not to lift your hat, neither night nor day, until the mouse has brought you good judgment."

So the Calabrian gave his friend and Filippo the twelve gold coins, and they divided the money.

Now let's turn to the Calabrian with the mouse on his head that seemed to be eating his head, while the poor Calabrian couldn't react. So, he said to his friend, "The mouse is eating away at my head, and it still hasn't brought me good judgment."

"My friend, be patient. Slowly but surely the mouse will bring you good judgment."

Well, the mouse kept eating away at his head, and one day the Calabrian became desperate. He began running and heard the bells of the church sounding mass. As he approached the church, he said to himself, "I want to hear mass. Maybe the Lord will bring me good judgment little by little."

When he entered the church, he mistakenly lifted his hat, and the mouse escaped. The Calabrian was frightened and began to scream, "Judgment, my good judgment's escaped me! It cost me twelve gold coins!"

He continued to scream and lament and ran to his friend.

“My friend,” he said, “my judgment’s escaped me, and I’ve lost twelve gold coins!

In response, the Casteltermian said, “My friend, didn’t we warn you not to lift your hat, otherwise you’d lose your judgment.”

The story ends here, for the swindlers devoured his money, and the Calabrian went away—poor, desperate, and with his head eaten by the mouse. *Told by Felice Sciarotta and collected by Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermi.*

### 153. THE PETRALIAN<sup>198</sup>

Once a Petralian happened to find himself in Palermo, and he saw a man from Cefalù,<sup>199</sup> who had given him credit many years ago. Sometimes he had managed to borrow money from him, sometimes he had gotten a meal out of him. The man from Cefalù noticed him and cried out, “Friend, when are we going to arrange matters and settle our affairs?”

“Now’s a bad time. I’ve got a large sum of gold, and I need to exchange it for money.”

“That’s nothing,” the creditor responded. “Let’s enter a shop, and we’ll take care of everything.”

“Of course, that’s a good idea,” the Petralian replied. “But let me enter first to arrange everything, and you wait here.”

“Well, go ahead then!”

So the Petralian went into the shop and said to the merchant some words like this: “Do you see that man outside? He’s a colleague of mine, and he’s too ashamed and timid to enter. That’s why he asked me to come inside. He’s a devotee of Saint Calogero<sup>200</sup> and needs a girdle for his hernia. But he’s anxious. So you must take precautions. Think carefully about how you will arrange his affairs.”

“All right,” the merchant responded. “Just show your friend in.”

The Petralian went outside and called to the creditor to enter the shop and told him the owner would handle his affairs. The Petralian cast an eye at the

198 Petralia Sottana is a town in the province, and the people from this town are known to be cunning and caustic.

199 A seaside town about an hour north of Palermo.

200 Saint Calogero is the protector of people with hernias, and that’s why they are devoted to him. In Sciacca his devotees celebrate his holiday by sitting on his bier while it is carried throughout the city, and they wait for an instant cure.

merchant indicating that he should take good care of the creditor, and then he immediately went on his way as fast as his feet could carry him. So the creditor remained alone in the shop with the merchant who asked him to enter another room because other people could see them in the shop. So he went into another room, and it appeared to him that it was time for him to be paid so he could go on his way. But things were not as he thought, for while he was looking to be paid, the merchant took a medical girdle in his hands and ordered him to get undressed, otherwise he couldn't take the proper measurements.

"What measurements?—Didn't the Petralian tell you that I wanted my affairs arranged and settled?"

"Of course he did, and now I'm going to measure and arrange this girdle for you."


"What girdle! I want the money that I'm supposed to get from him!"

"Money?" the merchant replied. "He told me that you needed a girdle because you were a devotee of Saint Calogero, and I can serve you in this affair."

When he heard this reply, the man from Cefalù began to curse and uttered a few words about the Petralian that were better said to a swine. Then he told the merchant the reasons why he was so upset. Indeed, he had given a good deal of money to the Petralian, who had used it to eat in a tavern. Disgusted and revolted by the joke that the Petralian had played on him, he went on his way. And this was how the Petralian made a fool out of the man from Cefalù.

*Collected in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 154. THE SICILIAN THIEF AND THE NEAPOLITAN THIEF

nce upon a time there was a Sicilian thief, and he came to Naples where he began making the rounds. Do you know how he did this? Well, once a wolf finds other wolves they get along with each other—they understand each other and immediately form bonds. Well, this thief became friends with a thief from Naples, and once they joined forces, they began robbing together.

One day—well you know how the Neapolitans are—they have mouths that

open like the claws of a crab.<sup>201</sup> Well, this Neapolitan began to mock the Sicilian and told him that one Neapolitan thief and swindler was worth ten Sicilians. What do you say to that? So they began to quarrel, and since they were good companions and men of honor they made a bet before all the men in their mob.<sup>202</sup>

“Let’s each perform a robbery,” the Sicilian said, “and whoever does better wins the bet.”

“Good, very good!” the Neapolitan replied.

The deal was done, and the first to try a robbery was the Neapolitan. Since he wanted to do a truly complicated robbery right above the police station, he needed the Sicilian’s help. So, at nighttime they set off, and the Neapolitan threw a beautiful ladder made of silk through a window. Both men wore dark clothes. He was the first to climb the ladder, and the Sicilian climbed after him. While he was climbing, the Sicilian quietly took a razor out of his pocket and sliced off the soles of the shoes that the Neapolitan was wearing, and he stuck the soles into the pocket of his jacket. The Neapolitan didn’t feel a thing. Now they robbed many things from the apartment, and without being noticed by the police patrol, they returned to their friends.

“Did you do it?”

“It’s been done, and I succeeded like a master thief.”

“What about you?” they said to the Sicilian.

“And I did even better.”

“How’s that?”

“Take a look and see if my companion has soles on his shoes.”

And while they were doing this, he took the soles out of his pocket. Then they looked at them with their mouths wide open.

“You’re right, my friend,” the Neapolitan said. “You’ve won the bet. It’s true that the Sicilians know more about these things than the Neapolitans. It’s best if we agree about this and continue always to work together.”

*Told by Giuseppa Giambrone to Salvatore Salomone-Marino at Borgetto.*

201 Pitrè notes that there is a Sicilian proverb about Neapolitans that is also common in Italy: *Napulitanu largu di vuucca e strittu di manu* (The Neapolitan has a big mouth and is tight-fisted).

202 Pitrè explains that it was a point of honor among thieves to take an oath in front of other crooks associated with the Mafia. There were rules of honor that the Mafiosi obeyed.

## 155. THE NEAPOLITAN AND THE SICILIAN

There was once a Neapolitan who set out into the world and made many trips until he finally landed in Palermo. When he went to lodge at an inn, he asked who else was staying there and was told that there was a Sicilian trader. After the Neapolitan learned his name, he asked to be transferred to the same room because he had a great desire to pay his respects to the Sicilian. Upon entering the room, the two men greeted each other ceremoniously, but once they began talking, they began to bicker about who was the most cunning and stealthy among the two. The Neapolitan told him about some of his great swindles, but the Sicilian insisted that all the Neapolitan's deals were nothing in comparison to his cunning tricks.

"Well, let's make a test," the Neapolitan said. "Let's go into the center of Palermo and see who can really do something stealthy and cunning."

So they went to the center of the city and began walking. When the Neapolitan read a poster outside a shop that was selling cloth and woolen things he signaled to the Sicilian to enter the store. So they went inside and greeted the owner and told him that they had come to buy some pieces of his cloth. The owner climbed a ladder and, without looking at what the two men were doing, he began talking: "Which kind of cloth do you want? This one over here or that one?"

The two men saw that the counter drawer was somewhat open, and the Neapolitan stole a small sack of two hundred gold coins and put it into his purse. While he was doing this and closing the drawer, he didn't give the owner any time to climb down the ladder with samples. Instead, he kept saying,

"I don't want this cloth. I want the cloth that's up there."

Once the Neapolitan had finished his theft, he had the owner bring down some cloth that he had in his hand. When he inspected the cloth, the Neapolitan said that it wasn't exactly what he was looking for and there was nothing in the shop he wanted to purchase. So he thanked the owner and left with the Sicilian.

On the street the Neapolitan was so happy with himself that he didn't care at all whether all the people from Palermo looked at him and thought that he was crazy. He walked about and kept talking with the Sicilian and saying that the Sicilians could never do what he had just done.

"I'm telling you," he said, "a Sicilian can't do it. You try and see where it gets you."

"All right," the Sicilian responded. "Let's enter this restaurant, and I'll show you what I can do."

The Sicilian was wearing a large hat<sup>203</sup> on his head that gave him the air of being an important person. He entered the restaurant with the Neapolitan, gave his respects to all the men sitting there, and with the permission of the Neapolitan, he took the owner of the restaurant aside and said, "Do you see that man I brought with me. Well, after everything's done, I'll pay for everything later for the both of us."

"All right," the owner responded. "Nothing to worry about, my lord."

Then the Sicilian ordered the food, and the owner brought them what they wanted, and the two of them ate very well, especially the Neapolitan, who ate a great deal. Afterward, the owner approached them and said a few words about settling the bill. The Neapolitan looked at the Sicilian and at the owner, and he indicated that he had been invited, which was true. The Sicilian, adorned with the hat, became very serious and responded, "Very well . . . Not to worry . . . This hat will pay everything!"<sup>204</sup>

He turned to his companion and said, "Let's go!"

They got up and left in a rush while the owner, who was in a fix, could only look after them. However, he believed that one day or other he would get his money. On the streets the two companions complimented each other on what they had just done and were in good spirits. The Neapolitan no longer had any doubts that the Sicilian was more cunning than he was, but he wanted to try another test because he thought that the hat had had some special power.

"All right," said the Sicilian, "let's go to another tavern. I'll take you to wherever you want to go."

Well, they went to another part of the city and ate in a restaurant, and as they were finishing, the Sicilian signaled to the owner that he would pay everything for his friend. When they were done, he said in a loud voice, "The hat will pay everything!"

The owner let them go, persuaded that he would be paid in the future. After a while the two companions went to another part of the city, and the Sicilian did the same thing. Later that evening when all was done, the Neapolitan took the Sicilian aside and said, "My friend, I want to ask you something."

"Well, what is it?" the other responded.

203 *Cappiddazzu*. This term for hat will play an important role later in the story. Taken literally, it means hat. Used as a pun and in a proverb, it has a different significance.

204 The Sicilian says "*stu cappiddazzu paga tuttu*," which literally means that this hat pays everything. However, the narrator is playing with the Sicilian proverb, "*cappidazzu paga tuttu*," which means that, if many people eat together, the bill falls to one person only, generally the last person at the table.

"I'd like it very much if you'd sell me your hat."

"My good fellow!" the Sicilian responded. "You know now what special power the hat has. When you and I went eating in the restaurant, it provided us with free food that I'd normally have to pay for with a lot of money, and you didn't have to spend any money at all. With this hat I can eat the rest of my life without spending money."

In short, they agreed upon a price of two hundred gold coins, the exact sum that the Neapolitan had stolen from the drawer at the cloth shop. After the deal was done, the Sicilian departed for his town, happy as a lark. The Neapolitan was also very happy that he had bought the hat and went on his way. The next day he went out to amuse himself with about fifty friends. Then he took them to a restaurant, and they all ate as much as they liked. When the time came to pay the bill, the owner approached the Neapolitan and asked him to pay. Instead of paying, however, the Neapolitan responded. "The hat will pay everything!"

"What?" responded the owner.

"The hat will pay everything!"

"What are you saying?"

Since the Neapolitan believed that the owner had not heard him clearly, he repeated much more loudly, "The hat will pay everything!"

Without shouting, the owner responded, "Who is this hat that will pay everything? You're the one, sir, who has to pay me, not the hat!"

To be brief, the Neapolitan kept saying the same thing, and the owner didn't listen to a thing he said. He locked the door of the restaurant and began to give the Neapolitan a beating, making him as well as his friends pay for the bill with a stick. When the Neapolitan managed to get outside, he still felt confident because he believed that he hadn't spoken to the owner with the same tone that the Sicilian had used. He went back to his home and brought the bruises from the beating with him.

However, since he was not content with what had happened, he wanted to try another test. So he went to his wife and children and some friends and promised them a free meal. They entered another restaurant and began eating whatever they wished. At the end, as usual, the Neapolitan said, "The hat will pay everything."

"What hat?" the owner responded. "You have to pay me, and there are no ifs and buts about it!"

In brief, this is how the affair ended with the Neapolitan, and he had to make the best out of it. The Neapolitan saw that wherever he got a beating it was due to the cunning of the Sicilian, who took the two hundred gold coins and caused him to get all those thrashings. He was convinced of this and

remarked, "Nobody is as cunning as the Sicilian and nobody can compete with him."

This is where the proverb *Cappiddazzu paga tuttu* comes from, and when people want to have credit, they say, "The hat will pay everything."

Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.

## 156. FIRRAZZANU

### 1. Firrazzanu's Wife and the Queen

Gentlemen, let me tell you about Firrazzanu, who was quite unique, for his antics could make even a mute laugh.

Firrazzanu was, let's say, a valet . . . to be more precise . . . a man who was in the service of the Prince of Palermo. He even played his tricks on this prince, but since Firrazzanu was well known and delighted everyone, the prince overlooked them, and Firrazzanu often got away with them.

One time the queen was in Palermo and wanted to get to know Firrazzanu. So he went to see her and amused her a while.

"Are you married or single?" she asked.

"Married, your majesty."

"May I become acquainted with your wife?"

"I'm afraid it's impossible, your majesty. My wife's somewhat deaf."

(This was something Firrazzanu made up off the top of his head because it wasn't true.)

"That doesn't matter," the queen replied. "When I speak with her, I'll shout. Go and bring your wife here."

Firrazzanu went home and said to his wife, "Cicca, the queen wants to make your acquaintance. But you must know that she's hard of hearing, and when you talk to her, you must speak in a loud voice."

"Very well," his wife said. "Let's go."

And they departed for the palace. When they arrived, she said to the queen in a loud voice, "I'm at your majesty's service!"

The queen said to herself, "Oh, now I see! She's shouting because she's deaf and so she believes everyone else is too." Then she turned and spoke in a loud voice to Firrazzanu's wife, "Good day, my friend, how are you?"

"I'm fine, your majesty!" she responded in a voice even louder.

To make herself heard better, the queen raised her voice and began to scream, while Cicca also screamed louder and louder so that it seemed as if

they were quarreling. All this was too much for Firrazzanu to take, and he burst out laughing because he couldn't hold himself back. Now the queen realized the joke, and if Firrazzanu had not run away, perhaps, perhaps she would have had him arrested, and who knows how it might have ended?

*Collected in Palermo.*

## 2. The Tailor Who Twisted his Mouth

One time, the Prince of Palermo, Firrazzanu's patron, had to have a new suit. He called Firrazzanu and asked him to get him a tailor. Now it's known that when tailors cut the cloth to make clothes, they often twist their mouths, and Firrazzanu went to such a tailor.

"Look," he said, "the prince wants you to come to the palace. Bring your cloth, pressing board, and scissors so you can make him a suit."

When they arrived at the palace, Firrazzanu went to the prince and said, "Your majesty, the tailor's arrived. But I must tell you something: this tailor has convulsions, and when he has one, he twists his mouth. If you hit him twice, he won't have the convulsions."

"When he's here," the prince said, "leave it to me. Believe me, he really won't get any convulsions."

The tailor came and spread the cloth over a large table and began measuring the prince. Firrazzanu went out of the room, but he watched the tailor doing his work through the keyhole. The tailor took his pressing board and began cutting. There was too much cloth, and the tailor began to twist his mouth. When the prince saw him twisting his mouth, he took a stick and gave him two whacks. The poor tailor screamed, "Oww! What's this about, prince?"

"It's nothing. Just continue."

The tailor continued cutting. Once again he twisted his mouth, and the prince gave him another two whacks with the stick.

"Oww! Oww! Why are you beating me like this when I'm working on your suit?"

"It's nothing. Your majesty's doing it for your sake."

Behind the door, Firrazzanu burst out laughing. In the meantime, the tailor began once more to cut the cloth, and as he cut and cut, he twisted his mouth a great deal. The prince was ready and gave him another two beatings. The tailor became enraged and began uttering terrible oaths. "Do you want me to finish, prince?" he asked. "If not, I'll begin beating you."

"My son," the prince responded, "I want you to know that when you twist your mouth and have convulsions, I'm hitting you to help you get rid of them. It's a cure."

“Who told you that?”

“I know it because Firrazzanu told me.”

Then the tailor said, “Another one of Firrazzanu’s tricks. Don’t deceive yourself anymore, your majesty. By the grace of God, I’ve never had convulsions. So for now, please get rid of that stick. I’ll see to Firrazzanu later on.”

And this was the only way that the tailor could continue his work without receiving a beating.

*Collected in Palermo.*

### 3. The Smuggled Goods at the Gate of Castro

Another time there was a peasant, who came from the mountains and was relieving himself right near the Church of St. Teresa.<sup>205</sup> Firrazzanu, who was very affronted, encountered him and said, “My friend, what are you doing here? Don’t you know that you need a permit to do what you’re doing? The police are nearby, and they’re going to arrest you!”

“Jesus!” the peasant responded. “What should I do if they come and see me?”

“You’ve got to gather up everything immediately, hide it in a kerchief, and wrap it all up.”

After Firrazzanu told the peasant what to do, he went to the Gate of Castro, where he encountered the guards and said to them, “Look, a mountaineer will be coming soon, and he’s carrying some smuggled goods.”

So the guards got ready for the peasant, and when they saw the peasant with the concealed goods, they called to him, “Hey, friend, stop where you are!”

The peasant was scared to death. The guards grabbed the concealed goods and took them away from him. When they saw the dish in the kerchief, they demanded an explanation. So the peasant told them that, while he was relieving himself, some man came by and warned him that he had better get up and collect everything because the police were coming and would arrest him.

“That was Firrazzanu who gave you the warning!” they exclaimed. “Woe to us if we believe anything he tells us!”

*Collected in Palermo.*

### 4. Firrazzanu and the Swineherd

One time Firrazzanu was as desperate as a bee in winter and racking his brains to try to find a way to stir things up. He left Palermo and saw a nice herd of

<sup>205</sup> This is a church in Palermo outside of the Nuova Gate not too far from the Castro Gate.

pigs, and he was struck by seeing how many huge and fat pigs there were. Along the way he met the swineherd, and he pretended to be a rich and grand person. When the swineherd saw him dressed so well and with a top hat, he said, "I kiss your hand, my lord! Would you like something?"

"Nothing," said Firrazzanu, "I just like to watch these pigs eat and that's why I approached you."

And this was the way Firrazzanu got to know the swineherd, and they began having long talks. Slowly Firrazzanu discovered who owned the pigs, when the pigs went out to pasture, when they ate, and many other things. Finally, he wished to see the pigs eat the beans.

"Oh!" he cried out. "How graciously they eat, my little pigs! I love them very much because they cheer me up."

Afterward, Firrazzanu took out six gold coins and gave them to the swineherd as a gift.

"This is for you," he said, "and from now on you would do me a great favor by waiting for me to come every day before you feed the pigs because it delights me so much to watch them eat."

For the swineherd this request seemed strange, but he said to himself, "Just look at the kinds of taste rich people have nowadays! But what's it to me? These are how the times are."

The next day Firrazzanu did the same thing, and after he saw the pigs eat, he said just what he said before: "How graciously they eat, my little pigs!" and then he gave six coins to the swineherd. To be brief, Firrazzanu began to lead this life for a few days, and the swineherd was pleased because it was as if God's providence had descended on him without his even searching for it.

Now, one day Firrazzanu went to the meat market and began negotiating with two butchers.

"Do you want to buy my herd of pigs?"

"Why not?"

"There are two hundred."

"How much do you want?"

"A lot. Let's say, two thousand gold coins."

"We'll give you a thousand eight hundred."

"No, sir. Give me a thousand nine hundred, and they're yours."

"No, sir."

"Yes, it's a gift."

"All right," they said, "but when can we see the pigs?"

"Come with me now."

And they departed to go and see the pigs.

By the way, I forgot to mention that Firrazzanu had told the swineherd that



his name was Baron Patruni. . . . So, now when they arrived at the pigpen, the swineherd came running and took off his cap to greet Firrazzanu, for he had become accustomed to receiving the six coins.

"Oh, Baron Patruni!" he cried out. "What is your command, my lord?"

"Have you given my pigs their beans?"

"No, my lord," he replied. "I was waiting for you, my lord. I'll do it right away."

While the swineherd went to fetch the beans, Firrazzanu said to the butchers, "Do me a favor and don't say anything to the swineherd about the sale of the pigs. The poor man loves them so much so that if he hears that they are being sold, he'll die on the spot. So, now, tell me, what do you think? Are you satisfied?—Is it a deal?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Well then, let's return to Palermo."

At this point Firrazzanu called the swineherd and said, "You, Peppi, tomorrow these gentlemen are going to come. I want you to treat them as if they were me, and whatever they tell you, you're to do."

"Tomorrow, I'll treat them as if they were you, my lord."

"Goodbye."

"I kiss your hand, my lord."

The next morning, after the butchers had paid Firrazzanu, they went to fetch the pigs. But the swineherd began to make a fuss.

"What, are you crazy? You want the pigs? Get out of here! Scram!"

"They're ours!"

"Yours? They belong to my master!"

"He sold them to us."

"You're crazy. The Prince of Messina (let's just say that this was his name) didn't sell you a thing!"

"What Prince of Messina?" they cried out. "It was your master, the baron, who sold us the pigs. Just yesterday we settled on the price, and he sold them to us."

"That's not my master," the swineherd said. "My master is the Prince of Messina. The man you're talking about, the man you met yesterday, is the one who comes and gives me six coins a day to see the pigs eat and I respect him. But he's not my master!"

"Is it true what you say?"

"I swear upon my heart!"

"Ah, he's tricked us, that crook! Quick, let's go search for him!"

The two of them ran off to hunt for the Baron Patruni. But who was the baron! Firrazzanu had taken off the clothes of the baron that he had used, and

he put on a beard. In addition he left the country to enjoy the good sum of money that he had taken from the two butchers.

*Collected in Borgetto.*

## 5. The Partridges<sup>206</sup>

One day the viceroy wanted to hold a grand dinner, and he needed partridges, also called humpbacks. But how was it possible when there were no partridges in Palermo? Well, Firrazzanu came and said, "I know that you need something that you can't find."

"Yes, Firrazzanu, I'm looking for those humpbacks."

"I'll find them for you."

"How can you do this when nobody else has been able to find them?"

"You just need a little ingenuity," Firrazzanu replied. "How many do you want?"

"About twenty."

Firrazzanu left, and after he found many hunchbacks, he said, "At the end of the day I want you all to meet me at the royal palace." By the end of the day Firrazzanu went to the palace and found that they had all appeared.

"Follow me!" he said and took them into the kitchen. Then he sent a message to the viceroy saying that the humpbacks were all ready in the kitchen.

"Is this true?" the viceroy asked. "Order them to come here."

Firrazzanu led the hunchbacks down the hall to the viceroy, and as they approached he called to them: "Come up here, my little ones!"

When they arrived in the room. Firrazzanu said, "Here they are."

The viceroy looked and cried out, "Where?"

"Here. You wanted humpbacks, and here they are!"

The viceroy burst out laughing, and he gave each one of the humpbacks a present and sent them on their way.

*Collected in Palermo.*

## 6. The Music of the Asses

Another time Firrazzanu wanted to play a joke on the prince once again. He gathered together some male asses and placed them beneath the prince's

<sup>206</sup> The title of this tale is "Li pirnicani," and in Sicilian the word means both partridge and hunchback (humpback). To make the point of this tale, we have decided to use humpback when partridge is meant, and hunchback in its usual English meaning.

window when the prince generally ate his dinner. Then Firrazzanu sent a servant to the prince who told him, "Your majesty, Firrazzanu sent me to tell you to listen and enjoy the music of the asses."

Shortly thereafter Firrazzanu brought the urine of female asses to the male asses, and when they smelled the scent of the urine, they began to *Hee-haw, hee-haw, hee-haw!* And their braying was so terrible and so long that the poor prince was driven crazy and had to send all his servants to tie down the beasts and to catch Firrazzanu. But do you think Firrazzanu was foolish enough to be caught? Indeed not. He took the first road that he found and escaped.

*Collected in Borgetto.*

## 7. The Twenty Percent

Once there was a very rich prince, let's call him, Prince Partanna, who had many rents to collect, and he couldn't manage to obtain them all. So he thought of making Firrazzanu the procurer.

"I'm making you my procurer," he said, "and you're to collect my rents. And I'll give you twenty percent of what you collect."

Firrazzanu went off to a village where he was to collect the rents, and he summoned all the peasants who owed money. Then, what do you think he did? Well, he had them pay only his part, the twenty percent, and nothing more than that.

"You can pay the rent to the prince another year," he said. "Now get out of here!"

Then Firrazannu returned to the prince, who asked, "What did you do, Firrazzanu? Did you collect all the rents?"

"What rent was there to collect!? I was barely able to collect my own twenty percent."

"What do you mean by this?"

"They had trouble just paying me the twenty percent that belonged to me. I told them that they could pay you your rent next year."

Imagine how the prince reacted! At first he kept quiet, and then he burst into laughter. And Firrazannu went away cheerful and content.

*Collected in Borgetto.*

## 8. Firrazzanu's Message

Another time the prince invited a few friends to go hunting with him. He met Firrazzanu and said to him, "Firrazzanu, I want you to go at your convenience

to the princess and tell her that I'm not going to be eating at home today because I'm going hunting."

Firrazzanu went off but only to take care of his own affairs. In the meantime, the princess waited and waited until it became midnight. When the prince returned, he found the princess sitting there and very worried.

"What's the matter, princess?"

"What do you think's the matter? Don't think that you can cover up for all the worries that you have caused me!"

"What! Didn't I send Firrazzanu to tell you that I was going hunting?"

"Don't give me Firrazzanu this, Firrazzanu that!"

After a week passed, Firrazzanu went to the princess and told her that the prince would not be returning home for dinner that day.

"That's all the better," said the princess. "Good timing. I've got to make some visits today." And she left.

Later the prince arrived and didn't find anyone at home. So he went into the kitchen and asked the cook what there was to eat.

"Nothing."

"And why?"

"Who knows."

Then the prince went to the chambermaid.

"Where's the princess?"

"Your Excellency, the princess has gone out."

So, the prince went and found her.

"Are you here?" the princess asked.

"Of course I'm here!"

"Well, didn't you send Firrazzanu to tell me that you wouldn't be returning home for dinner?"

"Today?" the prince remarked. "That's what you understood . . ."

When he saw Firrazzanu, he scolded him for causing such confusion, and Firrazzanu responded, "Why are you treating me like this? Didn't your Excellency tell me to go to the princess at my convenience? And that's what I did. When I felt it was convenient, I brought the message to the princess."

And the prince could do nothing but laugh.

*Collected in Palermo.*

## 9. When Firrazzanu was Banished to the Soil of Monreale

Another time he played a joke so irritating that the Viceroy banished him to spend the rest of his days on the soil of Monreale. When he arrived at Monreale, Firrazzanu amused himself, and the next day he borrowed a cart

and loaded it with soil. Then he got on top of it and drove the cart nicely to Palermo, where he passed by the entrance of the palace. He went to speak with the Viceroy, and the Viceroy had him arrested. But Firrazzanu protested and said the arrest was unjust because he hadn't broken the law; indeed, he was sitting on the soil of Monreale. This news pleased the Viceroy, and he granted him absolution.

*Collected in Palermo.*

## 10. The Hundred Beatings

Just listen to what Firrazzanu did another time:

His master wanted to give him a good lesson and wanted him to have a good taste of stick of wood. So, what do you think he did? He spoke with the commander of the castle and said, "In the next few days I'm going to send you my servant with a letter, and you're to do whatever I say in that letter."

Well, after a few days, let us say a week, the prince summoned Firrazzanu and said, "Firrazzanu, I want you to go to the commander of the castle, and you're to tell him that he's to do what I've written in this letter."

Firrazzanu left, and he read the letter from top to bottom and was not pleased by its contents. Just at that moment he encountered another servant and said, "Listen, I want you to do me a favor and carry this letter to the commander of the castle and tell him that he's to do what the letter says. When you return, we'll have a nice glass of wine together."

The servant went to the commander, who opened the letter, and this is what it said: "I order the commander to give 100 beatings to my servant who is truly impertinent. Then you are to send him back to me."

"Wait here," said the commander, who called the executioner, and he, in turn, put the servant on top of a trestle. Then the commander ordered him to give him 100 beatings with a stick. The poor innocent servant moaned and groaned that he hadn't done a thing, but the executioner told him that he had to follow orders.

Enough said. The poor servant left there more dead than alive, and when he returned to the palace, Firrazzanu burst out laughing and said, "My brother, between you and me, it's better you than me."

*Collected in Palermo.*

## 11. Firrazzanu and the Household Utensils

One time, when Firrazzanu passed by a vendor of household utensils, he called over to him and said, "How much do the chamber pots cost? Do you sell them by the weight or by their size?"

"As you wish," the vendor said playfully.

"How much does a pot cost by its weight?"

"As you like."

And they agreed upon a price. Then Firrazzanu struck the pot so hard that it broke.

"Weigh three ounces of this for me," he said.

The vendor began to curse, and Firrazzanu said, "What do you want? Didn't we agree upon the price? Whether by weight or size, the price doesn't change."

And he left the broken pot behind him.

*Collected in Palermo.*

## 12. Firrazzanu and the Egg Dealer

One time Firrazzanu came across an egg dealer, and he stopped him.

"Are your eggs fresh?" he asked.

"Of course. Look at them."

Firrazzanu took them in pairs, examined them, and said, "Wait a second while I choose the dozen I want."

Well, what did Firrazzanu do? He began to take one egg after the other from the basket and placed them on the arms of the egg dealer. The egg dealer believed that he was going to buy the eggs. When Firrazzanu was sure that the egg dealer couldn't move, he let the whole deal drop and went away. When the poor egg dealer realized what had happened, he began to yell, but the more he yelled, the more people gathered around him and saw this man attempting to cover himself with one hand so that people wouldn't see what a fool his mother had given birth to, while he was afraid to move the other hand, or else the eggs would fall and make one great omelet.<sup>207</sup>

*Collected in Ficarazzi.*

## 13. How Firrazzanu Spoke into the Ear of an Ass

Another time Firrazzanu went into the country and came across an ass loaded with clay bowls, jugs, and other household utensils. Joker that he was, he approached the vendor and said, "Friend, will you permit me to say a word or two into the ear of your ass?"

"Go ahead," the man said, "if you know how to talk to asses."

<sup>207</sup> *Facia 'na frocia* can also be translated as making a grand mess of things.

So Firrazzanu approached the ass and bent over to speak into the stem of the ass's ear as if he had something confidential to say to the ass. And what do you think he did? He took his lit cigar, and as he pretended to speak with the ass, he stuck it into its ear. You should have seen what happened! When the ass felt the cigar burning inside its ear, it began to kick and jump something terrible. Of course, all the household utensils became mush. The vendor who tried to control the ass was kicked and knocked down, and Firrazzanu burst into laughter as he watched the scene.

And this was how Firrazzanu spoke into the ass's ear.  
*Collected in Palermo.*

#### 14. Firrazzanu and the Spices

The porters used to have a spot where they gathered for their work, and they made a hole where they were accustomed to put their spices that they used to season their morning meal. Firrazzanu got wind of this, and one time he took some cow dung, dried it nicely, and made it as fine as could be as if it were spice. Then he poured it into the hole where the porters' spice was kept. When the porters arrived, they set out their food as usual and sprinkled it with the beautiful spices. Then they began to eat, but the taste was not the taste of spices. It did not take them long to realize this because Firrazzanu was watching them and burst out laughing. Indeed, he had made them eat the dung of a cow.

*Collected in Palermo.*

#### 15. Firrazzanu and the Father Confessor

Firrazzanu had done similar nasty things, and one day he fell seriously ill. The father confessor was called to offer him confession and communion. When the priest arrived, he began to say, "Firrazzanu, my son, there is life and death, and the Lord has come to pardon you. Think of how much you have done to our Lord!"

"Yes, father," Firrazzanu replied quickly to the priest, "But there's one thing he can do to me—he won't ever be able to forget me!"

*Collected at Ficarazzi.*

*Pitrè collected all thirteen tales told in Palermo, while Salvatore Salomone-Marino collected the two told in Ficarazzi.*

## 157. UNCLE CAPRIANO

Once during a journey this tale was told about a husband and wife who had a daughter. The man's name was Uncle Capriano, and he had a place near the village where he always worked. One day, thirteen thieves happened to pass by his place. They saw Uncle Capriano, dismounted, and began talking to him. In short, they formed a friendship with him. Ever since that day they always visited him and kept up their friendship. When they arrived, they would greet each other this way:

"Good day, Uncle Capriano!"

"At your service, my lords," he would respond. "What can I do for your lordships?"

"We've come to entertain ourselves. Go, Uncle Capriano, go and have your lunch. We'll do your work for you."

Uncle Capriano would go and eat, and they did his work for him. In the meantime, what do you think Uncle Capriano tried to do? Well, he began conceiving of a way to get some money out of them. When he went to his wife, he said, "Since I have this friendship with the thieves, I'd like to try to steal some of their money, and I want to tell them that we have a rabbit that I send home by itself every evening with firewood and vegetables for the soup that my wife cooks."

Then he turned to his daughter and said, "Before I come home with the thieves, you must bathe the rabbit and wait for me in front of the door. Then you're to say to me, 'Is this the way you load down the rabbit so that it comes home dead tired?' "

Later on, when the thieves heard that Uncle Capriano had this rabbit that carried such things, they talked about it and said to each other, "If we had such a rabbit, we could send it to carry money, food, and other things to our houses."

One day Uncle Capriano said to them, "It would give me a great pleasure if you'd come to my house today."

There were thirteen thieves. Some said yes, some said no. The chief of the thieves said, "Let's go and see the rabbit." When they arrived at the doorstep, the daughter came out and said, "Is this the way you load down the rabbit so that it comes home dead tired?"

After they entered the house, they all touched the rabbit and said, "Poor little bunny! Poor little bunny! It's all sweaty!"

When they saw the rabbit in this condition, they looked at each other and said, "Should we ask him if he'll give us this little rabbit?"

Then they turned to Uncle Capriano and said, "We're not going to waste any words about this. You must give us this rabbit, and we'll pay you whatever you ask."

Then Uncle Capriano responded, "You can demand of me whatever you want, but not this rabbit. If I give it to you, I'll be ruined."

"Without wasting any words, you have no choice, whether you're ruined or not."

He turned to his wife and said, "Now what do you think? It seems that it's a bad deal. But if these gentlemen demand that we do it, we must give them the rabbit. . . . So what should I say to the gentlemen? Give me 200 gold coins, and the rabbit is yours."

"Very well," they responded and gave him 200 gold coins plus 20 as a gift. Then they said, "With this extra gift you can buy yourself a cup of coffee. We're just happy with the rabbit. The money doesn't matter."

Upon saying this, they left and went to a house in the countryside to test the rabbit. They each took a bag of money and said, "Let's send a bag to each of our houses."

But the chief said, "First, let's have it carry a bag of money to mine."

So they loaded the rabbit, and when it had the money on top of it, the rabbit didn't budge. When they saw that the rabbit wasn't moving forward or backward, one of the thieves took a stick and hit the rabbit on its flank. Instantly the rabbit scattered away and was out of sight. Well, now the thieves were enraged, and they all exclaimed, "Does he think he can play tricks on us?"

They mounted their horses, and when they arrived at Uncle Capriano's place, they said, "Greetings, Uncle Capriano!" And they vented their anger and let off steam.

"I'm at your service, my lords," Uncle Capriano responded. "Is there anything the matter, my lords?"

"You can be sure that something's the matter!" one of them responded.

"Well then, explain it to me, my lords. If I have failed you in some way, let me know. I'm here for you."

"Where did you get the courage to play such a trick on us? How come? You sold us that rabbit, and when we loaded it with money, it didn't budge an inch."

"But did you beat it, my lords?" Uncle Capriano asked.

"Of course, we did," one of them responded. "One of us hit it with a stick on its flank."

Then the old man replied, "But where did you strike it? On the right or left side?"

“On the left,” a thief said.

“That’s why the rabbit fled,” Uncle Capriano explained. “You should have hit on the right side. What fault of mine is it if you didn’t do it the proper way?”

“Why, you’re right,” they said. “You’re absolutely right, Uncle Capriano. So, go off and eat, and we’ll do your work for you.”

So their friendship still remained close, and after some time passed, Uncle Capriano went to his wife and said, “We must swindle some money from those thieves again.”

“But how are you going to do this?” she asked.

“We’ll do it this way: tomorrow, you go and buy a new pot. Then you must cook something in another pot somewhere in the house, and at Ave Maria, right before I come home, you must empty whatever you cooked into the new pot and place this pot on the hearth without any fire. Tomorrow I’ll tell the thieves that I have a pot that cooks without any fire.”

The next evening Uncle Capriano said that he wanted to invite him to his home and persuaded them to come with him. After they arrived, they entered and sat down at the table to have some soup. When they saw the pot, they looked at one another and said, “We must tell him to give it to us. It’s perfect for us!”

Meanwhile Uncle Capriano turned to them and said, “My lords, you’ve been looking at that pot too long. You can ask anything of me, but not that pot.”

“Well, let’s be brief about this. How much do you want for it?” asked one of the thieves. “You can’t say no. You’ve got to say yes and tell us how much you want for it.”

Now Uncle Capriano turned to his wife and said, “What do you think? It seems to me that it’s a bad deal. But we have such a close friendship. You can say what you want, but I think we must give it to them. My lords, if you want it, give me four hundred gold coins, and it’s yours.”

So the thieves gave him four hundred gold coins and twenty extra as a gift, and he gave the pot to them.

Once they had the pot in their hands, they left. So, let’s follow the pot.

When the thieves arrived at their home, they killed a nice-sized kid goat, put it into the pot, and set it on the hearth without fire. Then they left. That night, when they returned, all of them began running to be the first to see the cooked meat. After most of them had arrived, one of them took a piece of meat and found it just as they had left it. Then he kicked the pot and broke it in two. When the rest of the thieves arrived and found the uncooked meat, they immediately set out for Uncle Capriano’s house. Once they were there, they said, “Greetings, Uncle Capriano.”

The old man noticed that they were angry and replied, "I'm at your service, my lords. Is anything the matter, my lords?"

"You can be sure that something's the matter!" one of them yelled.

"But I really haven't done anything to you, have I gentlemen?"

"What do you mean you haven't done anything? Didn't you give us the pot? Didn't you tell us that it could cook anything? We put some meat into it, and later we found that the meat was still raw!"

"But perhaps you gentlemen broke the pot"

"Of course we broke it."

"And what kind of hearth did my lords have, high or low?"

"It was a little high," one of the thieves said.

"Well, that's the reason why it didn't cook. It should have been low. What fault of mine is it if you didn't do it the proper way?"

"Uncle Capriano is right," one of the thieves said. "Go and eat, Uncle Capriano, and we'll take care of the work for you."

Once again their friendship remained intact. Meanwhile some time passed, and Uncle Capriano said to his wife, "It's time to swindle some more money from the thieves."

"And how are we going to do it?" she asked.

"We'll do it this way: You have a whistle in the chest, and I want you to make sure it's working. Tomorrow morning, you will have no other work to do but to go to the butcher's shop in the village where you are to purchase a bladder of blood. Tomorrow evening, my lady, you are to put the bladder around your neck and under your mantilla. Then you are to sit down in darkness and to pretend to be angry. Then I'll bring my friends, and when you are sitting in the darkness, I'll begin to cry out for you. But you won't speak. So I'll take a knife and cut your neck. You'll fall to the ground in the middle of the room, and the blood will run all over the ground, and the poor thieves will believe that you are dead. Then you, (the old man turned to his daughter and continued) mark my words carefully: you will get the whistle as soon as I say, 'get the whistle.' You'll give it to me. After I blow it three times, (Uncle Capriano turned to his wife) you will get up. When the thieves see this operation, they'll want the whistle, and we'll swindle them of another 600 gold coins."

The next day Uncle Capriano went to work, and toward evening the thieves arrived. As always, they greeted him in the usual manner:

"Greetings, Uncle Capriano."

"At your service, my lords. What can I do for my lords?"

"We've come to spend a little time with you. Go, Uncle Capriano, go and eat, and we'll take care of your work for you."

At one point they began talking, and he invited them to his house. Since they didn't want to insult him, all thirteen thieves went with him. When they arrived, they found the house in darkness and the wife very angry, sitting in a chair. Uncle Capriano began to shout and utter curses. Then he picked up a knife and stabbed her. When she was stabbed, she threw herself down on the ground. Meanwhile, Uncle Capriano turned to the thieves and said, "You see, gentlemen, when I get mad, I'm terrible. Each time that I become enraged, I can't manage to calm myself down until I kill someone."

Just think of those poor thieves who were there and how revolted they were!

"If we had known that this was the way things are in your home, we wouldn't have come," they said.

"I didn't mean I'd murder you," Uncle Capriano responded. "Each time I get angry, I kill my wife."

After a while, when he thought it was the right moment, he called his daughter and said, "Get the whistle that's in the chest."

Once he had the whistle, he blew three notes *tweet, tweet, tweet!* and his wife began to rise up. When the thieves saw her rise, they exclaimed, "What's that thing that he has? How wonderful it is that she's coming back to life!"

They talked among themselves, and Uncle Capriano turned to them and said, "Ask anything you want of me but not this whistle. Otherwise, I'll lose my wife because of my anger."

To be brief, the thieves turned to him and said, "Nothing doing. You have to give it to us without thinking about it anymore."

"No, gentlemen," he responded. "You can take my life, but not this whistle. Otherwise I'll lose my wife."

"But listen, Uncle Capriano, what do you want?" they said. "You're old now, and it's about time that you got rid of this vice of losing your temper."

So, Uncle Capriano turned to his wife and said, "Why are you crying? What do you want, dear wife? If I kill you, you won't be able to revive because I won't have the opportunity to help you. What should I say to these gentlemen? . . . They'll give me whatever I want. All right, if you give me 600 gold coins, the whistle is yours."

So they gave him the 600 gold coins and 20 more as a gift and took the whistle. That night the thieves began to discuss things.

"How are we going to do this?"

It had been some time since they had seen their wives, and they said: "Let's enter, make up some kind of excuse, and kill each one of our wives."

And this is what they did. After they had murdered their wives, they took

the whistle and began blowing it one after the other, but none of the wives were revived.

Now let's leave the thieves without their wives and turn to Uncle Capriano. Indeed, the thirteen thieves took a sack and went to Uncle Capriano's house. When they arrived, they grabbed him without saying a thing, put him on a horse, and left. They reached a beautiful spot where there was a cottage. The poor thieves! They hadn't eaten for some time, and so they said, "Let's have a meal here inside the house."

They left Uncle Capriano outside in a corner and entered the cottage. While Uncle Capriano was inside the sack, he kept repeating, "They want to give me the king's daughter, but I don't want her."

Now, there happened to be a shepherd nearby who heard him repeating that they wanted to give him the king's daughter, but he didn't want her, and he said, "Well, if he doesn't want her, I'll take her."

So he approached Uncle Capriano in the sack and said, "What's wrong?"

"They want to give me the king's daughter, but I don't want her because I'm married," he responded.

"Well, then let's make a deal," the shepherd said. "I'll take her because I'm single. But how are we going to do this?"

"Pull me out of the sack," Uncle Capriano said, "and you crawl inside."

"All right," said the shepherd.

He pulled Uncle Capriano out of the sack and crawled into it. Uncle Capriano tied it tightly, took the herdsman's staff, and went off to tend the sheep. Inside the sack, the shepherd began to say, "They're giving me the king's daughter, and I'll take her. They're giving me the king's daughter, and I'll take her!"

Now let's turn to the thieves who returned to pick up the sack. They put it on a horse and heard a voice saying: "They're giving me the king's daughter, and I'll take her."

When they arrived at the seashore, they threw the sack into the water and began returning home. As they were riding, they cast a glance at the mountainside, and one of the thieves said, "Look, chief, isn't that Uncle Capriano?"

"Huhh! It's really him!"

"How could it be? We threw him into the sea."

So they rode over to him and said, "Uncle Capriano, how is this possible? We just threw you into the sea."

"Well, my lords, you threw me into the sea near the shore, and I came

across these sheep and some oxen. But if you had thrown me further out, I would have come across even more.”

Then they put their heads together and said, “You know what we say to you, Uncle Capriano? We want you to throw all of us into the sea.”

And off they went to the sea. Once they arrived there, Uncle Capriano began throwing them into the sea one after the other.

“Quick, Uncle Capriano,” each one said, “throw me in quickly before the others get all the sheep and oxen.”

So the old man threw all of them into the sea. Then he took the horses, sheep, and oxen and returned home. When he arrived there, he began to build palaces, and Uncle Capriano became very rich. He arranged for a good wedding for his daughter and married her off. He was so happy that he had wed her to an important person that he invited many people and organized a grand celebration. So in the end,

They remained happy and content  
While we still don't have one cent.

*Told by Antonio Loria nicknamed Bonchiaru and collected by Leonardo Greco in Salaparuta.*

## 158. THE MAN WHO MENDED OLD SHOES

**T**here's a story they like to tell, that once upon a time there was a man who mended old shoes, and all he did was practice this trade wherever he went. Whatever small change he managed to collect during the day, he would spend on his evening meal of pasta seasoned with chicken liver. Inside his little house he would light his stove, put on the pot, and cook his pasta with liver. He always kept his flask of wine filled and had a good time with it.

Now one evening the king, disguised as a soldier, came to this man's front door.

“Greetings,” said the disguised king.

“And hail to you, my good soldier.”

“Is everything all right here with you?”

“Yes, everything's fine. Why not stay and have a drink with me, my brother? Here's the wine flask. We can drink an insult to the king—in

the king's face!'—that king with a pig of a son!<sup>208</sup> So sit and drink with me."

"I'm sorry, I have to move on now, but thank you all the same," the king responded.

"All right, I'm sorry you won't join me. God be with you," said the shoemaker.

And so he cooked and ate his meal and went to bed.

He spent the following day mending shoes as usual, and in the evening he prepared his pasta with chicken liver and got out his wine. Again the king showed up, since he happened to be nearby.

"Greetings."

"And hail to you, good soldier. And now let's drink to the insult—'in the king's face, that pig of a king!'"

"Oh, no, many thanks, but no," replied the king.

"Oh, please do, just sit wherever you like and have a glass with me."

"No, thank you," answered the king, who asked, "Did you earn much today?"

"Well, whatever I earn, it buys my pasta and chicken liver." And he went back to insulting the king.

When the king saw that this man kept speaking so badly of him, he returned straight to his palace. At dawn the next morning he issued a proclamation: "All shoemakers are forbidden to go around mending shoes in this realm."

Well, the next morning the shoemaker got up, took his kit, and started off to work. His neighbor saw him and asked, "My friend, where are you going?"

"I'm going out to work."

"If the king learns of it, he'll cut off your head! He's issued a proclamation forbidding all shoemakers in his realm from going around mending shoes."

"But how am I supposed to earn a living? How could I buy today's meal? My friend, I must ask you a favor. Lend me your donkey, and I'll load it with hay. Then I'll see what I can sell it for."

So he loaded the donkey with hay and went all over the countryside, and he earned more than he ever had before. That evening he used all the money for his meal of pasta and chicken liver—it all went for this one dinner with

208 Pitrè's note identifies this as a common Neapolitan insult that was often repeated by Sicilians, keeping it in Neapolitan dialect as an intended mockery of Neapolitans. Here the best this speaker can manage is a Sicilian-Neapolitan mixture, "*a la facci di chillu Re ch'ha fattu lu figliu porcu.*" He has assumed that the supposed soldier is Neapolitan, since, as Pitrè tells us, soldiers in past times were Neapolitan.

nothing left for the next day. As he lit his stove and was blowing on the flame, the king arrived again, still dressed as a soldier.

“Greetings!”

“And greetings to you.”

“What kind of a day did you have?”

“Let’s not talk about it, soldier. And here’s to that miserable king whose sons are all pigs!”

“Tell me what happened today. I heard there was a proclamation.”

“Yes, the king proclaimed that shoemakers are not—but let’s just drink, and say ‘in the face of that slut who gave birth to the pig king!’ ”

“Oh, no! I couldn’t drink to that.”

“Oh, won’t you ever give me the pleasure of sharing food with me?”

“No, thank you.”

“Well, why not just sit and have a drink with me?” And the shoemaker began speaking badly of the king.

“Tell me what you managed to do today,” asked the soldier, and the shoemaker sat there and recounted the whole story about the donkey.

“Well, I have to go now,” said the soldier when he had finished. “Goodbye, and be well.”

“Goodbye to you, good soldier.”

And so the shoemaker cooked his meal, went to bed, and slept.

At dawn the next morning, there was a drumbeat—tum, tum, tum!—as another proclamation was issued: “No one is allowed to go around this realm selling hay.”

The shoemaker arose and went straight to his neighbor’s house.

“Neighbor, can you lend me your donkey again?”

“What do you intend to do with it?”

“What do you think? I have to earn my food today.”

“Oh,” said the neighbor, “didn’t you hear the king’s proclamation? No one is allowed to go around in the realm selling hay.”

“Oh, no!” said the shoemaker. “Is he making these proclamations just for me? Well, give me your donkey again, we’ll load it with chickpeas, and I’ll sell enough to earn my dinner.”

So he loaded the donkey with chickpeas and went all over the countryside selling as much as he could, and managed to earn more than ever before. That evening he spent all he had earned on his dinner of pasta with chicken liver. As he lit the flame and was just blowing on it, the king arrived.

“Greetings.”

“And greetings to you, my soldier. Have a drink, the flask is right there.”

“Oh, no, but thanks just the same.”

"Let's drink, 'in the face of that king with a pig of a son!'"

"No, thanks, I'd rather not. But tell me what kind of day you had."

"Oh, let's not talk about it. I borrowed my neighbor's donkey and loaded it with chickpeas and managed to earn even more than ever before."

And then, when the king saw that the man continued to speak ill of him, he took his leave.

"Goodbye to you," he said.

"And to you as well," replied the shoemaker. But then he began to think to himself, "It could be that this soldier who visits me has been telling the king the bad things I say about him." And then he ate his meal and went to bed.

At break of day he heard the sound of a carriage, which came right to his front door.

"Shoemaker, the king has summoned you!"

"Whatever could he want with me?"

"You must come at once! It's the king's command!"

"Oh, gracious mother Mary! What am I to do? I'm afraid that the soldier went and told the king that I spoke badly of him. But I really didn't say such terrible things."

So they put him in a carriage and brought him to the palace. As soon as they arrived, he went up to the king and threw himself at his feet.

"And you, what do you do for a living?" asked the king.

"I mend old shoes."

"Well, there's no need for you to go around from town to town. What kind of living is that? Instead, you will put on a soldier's uniform and stay here." So they dressed the shoemaker as a soldier and made him a sentry.

When it came time for lunch, he asked, "Don't people get to eat in this place?"

"Yes, once every forty-eight hours," they replied.

"Oh my God! How am I supposed to stay alive?"

So, as soon as his sentry duty was over—and he hadn't eaten all day—he found a shop where he could sell a row of buttons he stripped from his uniform. He used the money to buy his pasta and liver and went straight to his house. As he was lighting the stove to cook dinner, the disguised king arrived.

"Greetings," said the king.

"And greetings to you, my good soldier."

"How are you doing today? Is everything all right?"

"Humpf!"

"Did you eat well today?"

"Eat? We get to eat only once every forty-eight hours! But I found a solution. As soon as I was off duty, I went and sold this whole row of buttons—do you see? I've covered the space with paper so it looks like I've only wrapped them to keep them clean. So now have a drink with me, and drink 'in the face of that king who is a pig.' "

"No, thank, you, I'd rather not."

"Well then, do have a seat. Won't you sit down and eat with me? 'In the face of that slut who gave birth to the pig king.' "

"No, thank you, and I'll have to say goodbye to you now."

"Goodbye, then."

So the shoemaker ate, then closed up his house and went back to join the guards. The following day, it was soldiers' mess, and he got a meal. But then he was put back on sentry duty, and he was unable to eat all day long. He was so hungry that his eyes were falling out of his head. Finally, at ten o'clock in the evening, he was released from duty and went immediately to the same shop to sell another row of buttons. Again he covered over the space with paper, took the money they gave him, and spent it all on pasta and chicken liver for his evening meal.

Well, the king turned up again, and once more the shoemaker invited him to drink and told him everything he had done. When the king was gone, the shoemaker-soldier ate, closed up his house, and went back to join his company.

The next day there was a soldiers' mess, but the following day, as if on purpose, there was no meal, and he was assigned to sentry duty. All day long he kept asking if the mess would come around, and by ten o'clock in the evening he was famished. The minute he was off duty he rushed to an iron-monger's shop, where he took out his sword and said, "Would you like to buy this blade? It's high quality steel." And the man gave him two gold pieces for the blade.

Then he took the sword handle and asked the man, "Would you do me a favor and give me a piece of wood?" Then he took the wood, attached it to the handle, and slipped it back into his sheath. Now he was able to buy his dinner, and he spent all the money on pasta and chicken livers.

The king made his customary appearance.

"Greetings."

"And greetings to you."

"What kind of day did you have?"

"Not so good. But I can confide in you about what happened. Do you see?" he said, drawing his sword. "I had to sell the blade." And he told him the whole story.

Well, the king thought he would die laughing, but he checked himself and took his customary leave.

As soon as he arrived at his palace, he did the following. He took four soldiers and ordered them to remove their clothes. Then he stationed them along his staircase, one at the bottom, two in the middle, and the fourth at the top of the stairs. He said to his guards, "When that shoemaker arrives, tell him to go up the staircase. And when he asks why these soldiers have bare bottoms,<sup>209</sup> tell him it's because they spoke badly of the king."

Shortly after, the shoemaker had finished his meal and arrived at the palace.

"Shoemaker," said the guards, "the king wishes to have a word with you upstairs."

As he climbed the stairs, he noticed the naked soldiers and asked, "What happened to these men?"

"They spoke badly of the king," came the answer.

"Oh, woe is me!" the shoemaker thought. "That soldier must have gone and told the king everything I said!"

When he came before the king, he threw himself at his feet.

"You may rise," said the king.

"And how may I serve your Majesty?"

"I'll tell you how," replied the king. "First, let me see your buttons."

"Here they are. I had to wrap them in paper to keep the dust off them."

Then the king had them send up one of the "bare-bottoms."

"Do you see this man?" he asked. "He is one of those who spoke badly of me. He deserves to have his head cut off. So draw your sword and cut it off at once!"

The shoemaker was uncertain what to do. "How do I solve this?" he thought to himself. But then he placed his hand on his sword handle and declared, "If this poor fellow is innocent, may my blade turn to wood!"

He drew his sword, and there was the wooden blade.

Well, the king couldn't have been more surprised. This was an outcome he could not possibly have imagined.

"You are free to go," he said, "big scoundrel that you are! I pardon you for all the bad things you said about me every evening. And from this moment on, I want you here as a member of my court."

And so that mender of old shoes ended up living at the royal palace, just like a prince.


So they remained, happy and content,

While we cannot even pay our rent.

*Told by Antonina Basile to Leonardo Greco in Salaparuta.*

209 Our translation tones down the Sicilian *caca-nudi*, which suggests men who defecate naked.

159. HOOK AND CROOK<sup>210</sup>

nce upon a time there were two men who were rogues and swindlers. One day, as one was on his way to the fair and the other was returning from it, they met a man who asked them, “My friends, what goods are you carrying?”

The first rogue claimed that he had pure silk, and the other that he had silk ribbons. “Well, then,” said one rogue to the other, “why don’t we make an exchange?”

“Why not?” came the answer, and so they exchanged boxes. But it turned out that the silk was really moss from a watering trough and the ribbons were really strips of reed. When each of them looked inside his box and saw the deception, they hailed one another as comrades.

“My friend,” said the one, “you are Hook, and I am Crook, which means we can get out of any trouble we get into. So here’s my plan. The king is about to build a treasury for his valuables. If we can bribe the master builder, he’ll make a section with a removable stone and show us its exact location.”

So they went to the master builder and bribed him accordingly. The treasury was built, and the builder showed the two rogues exactly where the movable stone was.

Now that his treasury was ready, the king decided to test it in the following manner. He had his men build a fire inside it and watch to see if smoke rose out from any spot, because that would indicate an opening. When no smoke was visible, the king concluded that there was no trickery or flaw in the construction and his wealth would be safe there, so he gave the order to begin loading all his money into it. Once his men had filled the treasury completely, the king had a golden rooster mounted there with burning torches.

Well, it didn’t take long for Hook and Crook to break in and steal some of the king’s money. When they got back home, Hook’s wife demanded to know where the money came from.

“It’s none of your business,” he replied. “Just keep it in a safe place.”

The following day the two of them were ready to raid the treasury again. This time Hook’s wife insisted on going with them, and so they took her along. When they got there, she thought nothing of taking the golden rooster.

<sup>210</sup> The Sicilian title is “Mbroglià e Sbroglia” based on the Italian verbs *imbrogliare* and *sbrogliare*. Their meanings combine the idea of entanglement and disentanglement with that of getting into and out of trouble. Thus our main characters’ names approximate Hook and Crook.

The following day the king sent his emissary to check the treasury for any signs of theft, and he discovered that the rooster was missing. When the theft was reported, the king and his men said, "Let's see if there's an opening somewhere." So they lit a fire inside the structure, and this time they saw smoke coming from the place where the stone had been removed.

"The culprit is sure to return and steal some more," they said. So they set a large cauldron of boiling pitch just inside the entry point.

Well, the thieves came back and it was Hook who entered first through the opening. "Oh, help!" he shouted as he fell into the boiling pitch. "Crook, help, I'm done for! I'm burning to death in this cauldron!"

When Crook saw that his companion had indeed died, he cut off his head and took it back home with him.

When the king's emissary came back to see if another theft had been attempted, he found the headless corpse. So he went before the king and reported, "We've caught the culprit, but we have only his body with no head."

"Take a long stake," replied the king, "impale the body on it, and go hang it up in the various neighborhoods in town, until you see someone who weeps over it."

Well, it happened that they chose Hook's own neighborhood, and his sister was there. She recognized the corpse and at once began weeping and wailing. Crook also was there and happened to be chopping wood with an axe. So he used the axe to make a cut in his hand. When the men carrying the corpse went up to them and asked why they were crying, Crook was able to say it was because he had cut his hand. When they saw the bleeding hand, they had to accept his explanation.

Now the king's men needed a new plan.

"What shall we try next?" they asked themselves. "Here's an idea. We'll enlist a group of forty old women to act as spies, and we'll put meat for sale in all the town's butcher shops at two gold pieces a pound. Whoever stole the king's money can afford to buy the meat, and that's how we'll catch him."

Well, the next day Crook's wife began longing for meat from the butcher shop and urged him to go buy some for her.

"Why not slaughter one of the chickens we have at home?" he said.

"No, it's the butcher's meat that I want."

"All right," said Crook. "Here's what I'll do. I'll take four goats and set candles on their horns, and then I'll go to the Capuchin monks and borrow one of their robes. Dressed as a monk, I'll go to the butcher and tell him that the father superior is sick so that he'll give me free meat."

When he came to the monks, and when they saw the goats with the burning

candles, they took them for evil spirits and everyone panicked and fled. So Crook was able to take a tunic and go to the butcher and get the meat for his wife.

Well, his wife made a broth with the meat, and soon one of the old women turned up at her door and inquired about the soup. The wife offered her some and put a piece of meat in it. The old woman cleverly kept the meat aside and ate only the soup. As she was leaving, she took an inkpot she was carrying and marked the door of the house with a little cross, so they would know which house the meat came from.

But suddenly Crook appeared. "Where are you coming from, my little chickadee?" he inquired.

"I'm coming from a good Christian house where they treated me very well," she replied.

"Well, you should come with me, and I'll treat you just as well," he said.

"That's not necessary, my son," she said, "because they gave me a fine soup and all I could want."

But he forced her to accompany him and brought her to where they were keeping Hook's severed head.

"You were planning to trap me," he said, "but now I'm the one who has trapped you!"

And he killed the old woman and cut off her head. So that evening, when the forty old women came back to report, there was one missing.

Meanwhile, Crook came home and saw the cross marked on his front door. So he took an inkpot and went around making crosses on all the doors. But it had been reported to the king that there was a cross on Crook's door, and he made a visit to the house.

"This must be the place where the thieves live," he said.

"Oh, no," replied Crook. "All the other doors have crosses too."

And so the king decided that the old woman must have been drunk. "And who knows what's become of her?" he thought to himself.

Now there was nothing else the king could do but issue an edict: "Whoever committed the theft from the royal treasury is no longer in danger of losing his life. On the contrary, he will be rewarded."

And so Crook decided to present himself to the king. He showed up dressed like a pilgrim, and at first the king did not believe him. But then he recounted the whole story of what he had done, and the king accepted him fully. He rewarded him with a gift, saying, "You've proved that you're a remarkable man and deserve to prosper."

*Collected by Antonino Traina (author of the Nuovo Vocabulario Siciliano-Italiano, Palermo, 1868-73) in Caltanissetta.*

## 160. THE MASON AND HIS SON

Once upon a time there was a mason who had a wife and a son. One day the king summoned this mason and asked him to build a house in the country for his money, for he had a lot of money and didn't know where to store it all. The mason began to build the house along with his son. They placed a stone in one of the corners that served as an entrance the size of a man, and the stone could be lifted to open and close the entrance. When they finished their work, the king paid them, and they returned to their own home. The king began to put his money into this house and stationed guards all around it. After a few days had passed, he saw that nobody attempted to go there, and so he removed the guards.

Now, let's leave the king and turn to the mason. After he had spent all this money, he said to his son, "Why don't we go to the king's house in the country?"

So he picked up a sack and went there with his son. When they arrived at the house, they lifted the stone, and the father entered. He filled the sack with gold coins, went back outside, replaced the stone as it was before, and departed. The next day the king rode to the house in his carriage. When he was inside, he saw that the pile of coins had diminished, and he said to one of his servants, "Somebody's been taking my money."

"That can't be, your majesty," they responded. "Who's come here? And how could they get in? It could be that the house has sunk and settled a bit since it was just recently built."

So they took what was needed and departed.

Some time passed, and the mason said to his son once more, "Let's return to the king's house."

They took the same sack and departed. When they arrived, they lifted the stone as usual, and the father entered and filled the sack. Then they left. That very same night they made another trip to the house, filled the same sack, and returned to their home. The next day the king made the same blessed trip, this time with his soldiers and councilors. When they went inside to look at the money, they saw that the piles of gold had become much smaller. The king turned to his councilors and said, "Somebody's certainly come here and taken my money."

"Well then, your majesty," his councilors said, "if you say that things are like this, there's one thing you can do: take a few vats, fill them with melted pitch, and put them around all the walls on the inside. Whoever enters will fall into one of them, and this is how you'll find your thief."

So they immediately hauled vats of pitch and placed them inside the house. Then the king ordered guards to be stationed around the house, and he departed with his entourage. The guards remained for a week, and when they saw that nobody came to the house, they departed. So, now let's leave the guards, who went away, and turn to the mason, who said to his son, "Let's return to the house as we usually do."

So they took the sack and departed. When they arrived there, the mason took out the stone and went inside. As soon as he entered, he got stuck in the pitch, and when he tried to get his feet loose, his hands got stuck, and he called out to his son, "Listen to your father, and do what I say! Cut off my head, rip up my jacket, replace the stone the way it was, and throw my head into the river. This way they won't know who I am."

So his son cut off his head, ripped up the jacket, replaced the stone, and went away. Then he threw the head into the river and returned home. As soon as he got there, his mother asked, "And your father, where is he?"

When he told her what had happened, she was distressed and began to tear out her hair. After a few days had passed, the young boy, who had not been trained for any type of work, went to serve as an apprentice to a carpenter. Before he left, he told his mother not to say anything to anyone, just as if nothing had happened.

So, now let's leave them and turn to the king who went to his house in the country the next day with his councilors. When they entered, they saw the mason's body and approached to get a better look.

"But this person doesn't have a head!" the king said.

"Take the body," the councilors said. "Have him carried through the streets for three days, and wherever you see some one weeping, you'll know who this person is."

So they took the body and called Filippo Carrubba and Brasi Vuturu, two undertakers in the town<sup>211</sup> and ordered them to carry the corpse through the streets. It so happened that, just as they passed through the street where the mason's wife lived, she was outside and burst into tears. The son, who was working in a shop nearby, struck his hand with an ax and cut off his fingers. Meanwhile, the police entered the mother's house and said, "We've found out who it is!"

At that very moment the son entered and declared, "She's not crying because of the dead body, she's crying because I accidentally cut off my fingers and can't work anymore and earn a living."

211 These were actual undertakers in Salaparuta, where the tale was collected.

When the police saw his hand, they believed him and went away. When it turned dark, they carried the body to the royal palace, where they built a scaffold outside and set the corpse on the platform because they had to carry it around for three days. Meanwhile guards were stationed around the scaffold—eight soldiers and a corporal. Since it was winter, it was very cold. The son decided to take a mule and load it with drugged wine and pass by the soldiers. When they saw the wine, they said, “Hey, friend. Come over here! Are you selling that wine?”

“Sure I’m selling it,” he replied.

“Wait a second while we have a drink. We’re trembling.”

He stopped and let the wine flow.

“Drink,” he said.

They began to drink, and after they had drunk, they fell to the ground and went to sleep. When all of them were sound asleep, the son loaded his dead father on the mule, and after he buried his father outside the town, he returned home. The next day, when it turned dawn, the soldiers got up and said, “How can we go to the king? What will his majesty say to us? Enough, enough, he really can’t kill us!”

They went to the king, and when they arrived, he said, “Where’s the dead body?”

“The dead body?” they said. “What do you want from us? It was cold. Somebody passed by with wine. We called him, and he gave us some wine to drink and we fell asleep. The next morning, no sooner did we get up than we noticed that the body was gone.”

The king issued a proclamation: “Whoever succeeds in finding the body of the dead man will be rewarded with a large sum of gold coins.” So everyone began looking for the body and digging up the ground all around the town and vicinity. Finally, someone found it and brought it to the guards who gave him a large sum of gold coins. Now the undertakers began again to carry the body around the town to see if anyone would recognize it. Once they saw that no one had recognized it, they brought it back to the scaffold. That night, the same numbers of guards were stationed around the body, but this time they were all new guards. The son, whose name was Nino, went to the monastery and got a mule and two barrels of drugged wine. He also asked them for nine robes with cords and hoods and a large cross. Then he went and passed by the guards, and when they saw him, they cried out, “Hey friend, what are you carrying?”

“I’m carrying two barrels of wine that the monks made.”

“Do you want to give us a little of the wine? We’re dying from the cold!”

“There’s plenty here if you want to warm yourselves.”

And he gave them some wine to drink. As soon as they drank it, they fell asleep. Nino dressed them all in the monks' clothes and put the cross in the middle of the corporal's legs. Then he took his father's dead body and went to bury it. This time he buried it far from the town and then returned home.

Now let's turn back to the soldiers. At dawn they woke up and looked at each other.

"Oh, how beautiful you look, dear monk," one of them said.

"And you. You're not bad either!"

"Look, the corporal has a cross between his legs!"

"What are we going to say to the king? The body's been stolen once again!"

They got up and went to the king, and when he saw the monks approach, he said, "What's going on here? Why are you soldiers dressed like monks?"

"What were we to do, your majesty? We felt cold. Someone passed by with a mule that was carrying wine, and we began to drink because of the cold weather. As soon as we drank the wine, we fell asleep, and when we awoke, we were dressed like monks."

So, now the king had to issue another proclamation. "Whoever finds the dead body will receive a large sum of money." So, the people began to search again. Someone found the body, carried it to the guard post, and was given a large sum of gold coins. After he took the money, the undertakers carried the body through the town once again to see if anyone recognized the body. In the meantime, Nino could not find any peace of mind and went to Cianedda,<sup>212</sup> the goatherd.

"Will you do me a favor?" he asked.

"If I can," Cianedda responded. "Not only one, but two. What can I do for you?"

"Please lend me your goats this evening."

"You can have them."

So Nino departed and went to buy four pounds of candles and an old clay pot. Then he knocked out the bottom and attached the candles all around it. Afterward he fetched the goats and stuck two candles to the horns of each one and brought them near the place where the soldiers were guarding the dead body. Once there he drove two goats ahead of him with their candles lit on their horns. Then he sent four more goats with lit candles and finally eight others. When the soldiers saw the goats, they cried out, "Look! The devils are coming to fetch the corpse!"

Now Nino sent twelve more goats, and he marched behind them with the

212 The actual name of a goatherd in Salaparuta.

pot on his head and the candles lit. As soon as the soldiers saw him coming, they left the dead body and fled. Now Nino took the dead body and went to the seashore where he threw it into the sea. In the meantime the soldiers ran to the king, who said, "What's the matter? What's wrong with you?"

"Your highness, don't speak! The devils have come with all their diabolic tools, and they've carried the dead man away."

When it turned daylight, the king issued a proclamation: "All the old women of the city must gather at the royal palace." The proclamation also said that the butchers were to sell their meat at five gold coins a pound. Once a hundred women were assembled, he told them to go all over the city to see who was cooking any meat and to ask for a piece of it. So the old women departed. Meanwhile, Nino went to a butcher shop to buy some meat.

"How much is it?"

"Five gold coins."

"Five gold coins?"

So Nino gave him the money, and the butcher lifted his eyebrows, put the money in his pocket, and said, "Many thanks. I don't know what I should do with all of this."

Nino left and went to his mother to give her the meat.

"Here, take this meat and cook it," he said.

His mother took the meat and began cooking it after he left. Just at that moment a neighbor came by.

"Please, could you be so kind as to help me."

When she entered the kitchen, Nino's mother said to her, "What can I give you old woman?"

"Give me a piece of the meat that you're cooking."

Nino's mother took a piece and gave it to her.

"Take this," she said, "and leave before my son returns."

While the old woman was descending the stairs, she bumped into Nino.

"What are you looking for?" he asked.

"I'm just trying to earn a piece of bread by asking some alms from people I meet."

"And what are you carrying beneath your apron?"

"Nothing. Just a piece of bread."

"Well, old woman, you'll have to come along with me!"

He took her by the arm, and since there was a well in the courtyard, he threw her into it. At noon, all the old women were supposed to gather in front of the royal palace. They all appeared except one. The king summoned the butcher and asked him whether he had sold some meat. He weighed the meat and noticed that it was lighter than before. When the

king saw this, he issued another proclamation to learn who had performed all these wonders.

"If he is single, I'll give him my daughter. If he is married, I'll give him a large sum of gold coins." So now, Nino went and presented himself before the king and said, "Your majesty, it was me."

The king burst out laughing and asked him, "Are you single or married?"

"Your majesty, I'm single."


"Would you like my daughter," he asked again, "or two bags of gold coins?"

"Your majesty, I want to marry. Give me your daughter."

Everyone got to work, and dressed him like a lord, and then Nino was married to the princess. They made a grand feast and threw handfuls of wedding sweets. I was there and saw the sweets fall on the ground. I went to pick some up, but it was something else—just smell the odor!"<sup>213</sup>

*Told by Maria Viviano and collected by Leonardo Grecco in Salaparuta.*

## 161. THE SHOEMAKER

nce upon a time there was a shoemaker who was so poor that he had nothing to wear and nothing to eat. He had four daughters, and they couldn't find a grain of food either. So one day he set out for the countryside to gather the ingredients for a simple soup. After he found what he needed, he gave it to one of his daughters and said, "Take this back to the house and begin cooking the soup until I arrive."

Then the poor fellow continued walking for some time, lost in thought and continually pondering his miserable luck. Finally—whether for good or evil fortune—he saw a little purse lying on the ground as he was returning to his house. When he picked it up, he saw that it was filled with money, and so he put it in his pocket.

When he got home, his wife and daughters were all furious at him.

"You wretch!" she exclaimed. "Where have you been? The soup has cooked and cooked until it's as thick as paste!"

"Here I am dying of hunger," he replied, "and you are giving me a hard time! Go and spoon out the soup as it is, and let's have some bread."

<sup>213</sup> Pitre indicates that the *confetto* (wedding sweet) was, in fact, a *stronzolo* or turd. The worst humor is connected to the caustic endings of many of the tales.

"That little bit of soup is all we have, and there isn't any bread."

"Well then," he said, "take this money and go and buy us two loaves of bread, and a liter of wine as well."

"Oh, my good husband," said his wife, "where in the world did you get this money? Did you find work somewhere?"

"That's no business of yours. Just keep quiet and leave everything to me."

And so they had their dinner. When they were finished eating, the husband said to his wife, "And now, my good wife, I feel the need to go to confession this evening."

So he went to confession and said to the priest,

"Father, I had an unusual experience. As I was walking home, I found a little purse full of money, and I'd like to hear from your reverence what I should do with this money."

"My son," replied the priest, "you should first make a public announcement and see if the person who lost it turns up. If that doesn't work, we'll think of something else."

"Well," thought the man, "why should I pay someone else to do the announcing if I can do it myself?" So he went all around the town calling out in a whisper,<sup>214</sup> *Whoever has lost a purse full of money should come to see me!*" He went through every street announcing in this way, and when people asked him, "Are you announcing something for sale?" he would answer, "Yes, chests and doors."

That evening he went back to confession and said to the priest, "Father, I made the announcement myself, but couldn't find a single soul who lost the money."

"Well, my son, I have a solution. Bring the money here, and we'll donate it to the souls in Purgatory who suffer at the Crucifixion."

"All right, Father, as you say."

So he went back to his house and got to thinking. Then he called his daughters and had them take off their clothes so they were nude. He also had his wife wrap herself in a black mantle to look like the Madonna of Sorrows. Then he looked at his daughters and said, "Perfect! These girls look to me like the poor souls in Purgatory. Here," he added, taking a handful of money, "this is for you poor suffering souls in Purgatory."

Next, he turned to his wife. "Merciful Jesus!" he exclaimed. "You are the perfect image of the Madonna of Sorrows. I want to make this contribution to you as well," and he handed her some more money. Then he took two

214 Pitrè notes that the storyteller lowered his voice to make these words almost inaudible, to show the dishonest manner in which the man was obeying the priest.

tables and set them at right angles to form a cross and hung them on the wall. Next he took off his clothes, wrapped a towel across his waist, and got up on the cross.

"Tell me, oh wife and daughters," he said, "who do I look like now?"

"It's Jesus himself!" exclaimed his wife. "You look exactly like Jesus on the cross!"

"Then take the rest of the money and give it to me," he replied, "since I seem like our crucified Lord. And now light two candles and set one on each side of me and have our neighbor run to the priest and call him to hear my confession."

Well, when the priest heard this, he came at once to hear the man's confession. As he entered the house, he was amazed to find the man up on the cross like a crucified Jesus, his daughters naked like souls in Purgatory, and the wife all wrapped in a black shawl like the Madonna of Sorrows.

"Father," said the man to the priest, "you're the one who told me I should donate the money to the Crucifixion and to the souls in Purgatory. Well, just look at us. Here you have the blessed souls in Purgatory, the Crucifixion, and Madonna of the Sorrows. And so here is where I gave the money, just as you said."

"My good man," answered the priest, "since this is what you thought up, and you are obviously in a state of need, you and your wife and children should have the money, and may the good Lord bless you!"

And so the shoemaker was able to put good clothes on his wife and children, and he himself now had some capital to put into his business, and they all were able to earn a good living and have a happy life.

So they lived on, happy and content,  
While we live here without a cent.

*Collected from Antonio Loria by Leonardo Greco in Salaparuta.*

## 162. THE SHOEMAKER AND THE MONKS

A shoemaker with a very large family was at a loss as to how to feed them all. He owned a small country farm, but his efforts there yielded next to nothing. So one day, when he heard about a lady who had lots of piglets, he decided to go there and see what exchange he might work out with her.

Soon after he arrived at her house, he greeted her respectfully and told her why he had come.

"I can give you a piglet," she said, "but you must pay me cash for it, since I have no need for shoes right now."

This was not the answer the shoemaker had been hoping for, and he felt as if he had been cut off at the knees.<sup>215</sup>

"Well," he said, "suppose we agree that I pay half the cost now, and the other half as a discount on whatever shoes you might have me make."

These were the terms they agreed on, and he gave her half the money and took the little pig home with him. When he showed it to his wife and children, they were quite happy with the pig and began feeding it well from the first day on.

In a year's time it had grown to be a nice fat hog, and the wife and children encouraged the man to sell it because they really needed the money. But the shoemaker insisted that they should have a special feast and slaughter the pig for that occasion. Well, he wanted one thing, and they wanted the other, but the greater number prevailed, and they got ready to sell the pig.

Now by chance a certain priest, Father Guardianu, was passing by the house of the shoemaker—who was called Master Peppi—and he saw the enormous pig and decided to ask what the price was. The wife and children, eager to sell, quoted him a price, and he agreed. The priest said that the monks of the monastery would be paying for the pig, and he wrote them a little note that they were to take to the monks in order to get their money. But what he had written in the note were instructions to slaughter the pig at once, and to lock Master Peppi in a cell when he came for his money and to give him a sound beating with their staffs.

The poor shoemaker couldn't read nor write, and so, when he went to the monastery with the pig and the note, the monks detained him with small talk without giving him one cent of his money. While the pig was being slaughtered and prepared for cooking, the monks went into the kitchen to set up for the meal. The shoemaker noticed the elaborate preparations, kept talking with them, and expected that they would offer him a taste of the food.

Finally, when it was time for dinner, a brother came to summon the other monks to the table, and by now Master Peppi's mouth was watering.<sup>216</sup> The mere aroma made him feel as if he were in heaven, and he waited from minute

215 We have used this English idiom to represent the original, literally "he saw himself shot in the feet," *si vitti sparatu 'nta li pedi*.

216 We used this conventional English idiom for the more vivid original, "his gullet was going nnicchi nnicchi," *la gula ci facia nnicchi nnicchi*.

to minute for them to offer him a bite to eat. But he remained frustrated because no one ever appeared, while inside him his bile juices kept on flowing. "It's amazing how badly these dogs can treat people!" he said to himself. He waited until he thought they had finished eating, and then he could stand it no longer and went and knocked at their door. A brother appeared and asked what he wanted.

"What do I want?" he exclaimed. "I want my money for the pig that you're eating!"

"All right," replied the brother, "I'll go and tell the monks."

Then the head monk himself came to see what Master Peppi wanted. Peppi met him at the door and said again that he wanted them to settle his account.

"Just come this way, and we'll settle your account all right," said the monk.

He led him into a small cell, and after calling his fellow monks, they all began whacking him with their staffs. You can imagine how the poor shoemaker felt! First they let him die of hunger, and now they beat the living daylights out of him! Eventually he was able to get away from them—with God's help—and he made his way home more dead than alive.

When he entered the house, his wife and daughters asked him how things had gone with Father Guardianu, and whether the monks had paid him the money, and he had to tell them the bad news. He showed them his poor battered head, and they sent for some ointment and rubbed it on. But then the shoemaker told them not to get angry because he knew what to do next.

The following day he saw Father Guardianu and gave him an earful, describing how he had been beaten within an inch of his life.

"What do you expect?" was the priest's reply. "That's the way the monastery pays!"

"Oh yes, right you are, Father Bloodsucker!"<sup>217</sup>

Now that the shoemaker understood the monks' dishonest method of "paying out," he went home and pondered his next move. He told his wife that payment for the pig would eventually be coming, but first they had to make a certain sacrifice by selling the small vineyard they owned.

"But it's the only possession we have," she replied. "If we sell it, what will happen to our daughters?"

"Don't worry," her husband answered, "we won't fail to get our payment for the pig."

To make a long story short, they sold the vineyard and now had some money. The shoemaker went to a master carpenter and ordered him to make a

217 This is our attempt to capture the pejorative Sicilian *Patri Cricchia*, which Pitre says is a standard anti-clerical expression.

magnificent armchair, all covered with gold leaf, and to spare no expense. Within three days, the work was done, and the carpenter brought him the chair. After Peppi paid for it and the man left, he studied the chair and was impressed with how beautiful it was. "Look," he said to his wife and daughters, "this magnificent armchair is going to bring us back the money for our pig."

"Oh, for sure," was his wife's reply. "You can keep hoping until the cows come home!"<sup>218</sup>

Master Peppi's next move was to go and buy some candles. He brought them home, and then prepared a strong rope that he tied to the armchair. His wife and daughters asked him what he was planning to do with all this, but he wasn't ready to answer them yet. "You'll see when the time comes," was all he would say.

When evening came, the shoemaker left his house and went to the monastery church. He used a ladder to climb up on to the roof and began removing roof-tiles until he had made a large opening, big enough for the armchair to enter. Then he climbed down and went home to get the chair. He told his family to go to bed and sleep peacefully and not to worry when he didn't come back that night. His wife and daughters understood and didn't expect him to return.

Now Master Peppi went back with the armchair and carried it to the roof of the monastery. Then he attached the candles to the arms of the chair and lit them. Next, he lowered the large chair down into the middle of the church, holding tight to the rope, and began shouting in a loud voice from the roof, "Father Guardianu, Father Guardianu, Jesus wants you to join him in Heaven!"

Now, at this moment the monks were singing mass in their choir, so at first nobody heard anything. But as the voices all mingled and grew louder, the monks could no longer follow the service. Finally they were able to make out the single voice that was repeating the refrain. "Father Guardianu, Father Guardianu, Jesus wants you to join him in Heaven!"

By now Guardianu was shedding tears of joy and told the monks that he was obliged to leave them because Jesus was calling him to Heaven in body and in soul. But they all clung to him tightly and asked, "Why do you want to leave us, Father Guardianu? Have we done something wrong?"

"Don't you all hear the voice calling me?" he answered. "It's clearly an angel who's come down from Heaven for me, and I can't refuse."

218 A literal translation of *cu ssa spiranza vui aviti a stari friscu* is "with that hope you can stay cool." The Sicilian idiom *stari friscu*, "to stay cool," is a metaphor for nursing an unrealistic expectation.

“Well then, do what you have to, and we mustn’t detain you. But you will remember, won’t you, to protect us and never forget about us?”

“Of course I will! Why, even when I’m face to face with God, I’ll be praying for you and doing my best to bring good luck to you all.”

Upon saying that, he went around the church, gave a final embrace to all the monks, and then asked the angel if he was supposed to sit in the armchair in order to ascend to Heaven.

“Yes sir, by all means,” replied Master Peppi from the roof. “This is the chair that will take you to Paradise!”

So Father Guardianu sat down in the chair, and slowly he began rising. Meanwhile, the shoemaker, who was pulling him up, was saying to himself, “My God! He weighs a ton! It must have been the meat from my pig that’s fattened him up so much!”

But with constant effort he succeeded in lifting the priest all the way to the roof.

“Welcome aboard, Father Guardianu! Do you recognize me?”

“Aren’t you the angel of God?” replied the priest.

“To be sure, Father Muttonhead! And now I’ll teach you whose pig you ate and who it was you had beaten within an inch of his life! Do you remember what you said to me then? *That’s the way the monastery pays!* So now I’ll show you the way that *I* pay! Get ready to bounce!”

And so saying, he let the chair with the priest drop straight down into the church, where it struck with a frightening crash. Father Guardianu was lying on the ground unable to move, with broken ribs and blood streaming from his head. He began shouting and all the monks and brothers came running, picked him up, and carried him to a bed. And as for the shoemaker, he just climbed down from the roof and went home.

Back at his house, he told his wife and daughters everything that had happened, but he still didn’t feel compensated for all they had done to him. So he devised a new plan. He dressed up in fancy clothes, with a round hat and a watch chain and all, and set himself to studying Italian,<sup>219</sup> so that in two months’ time he was able to approximate real Italian speech. Then he put on a fake beard and sent out word that a famous doctor had arrived from abroad, who was a master at curing any illness.

Now it so happened that one day, as he was out walking, he met a monk who was begging for alms. He gave the monk five coins, and as they began conversing, the monk told him the whole story about Father Guardianu,

219 Most Sicilians at this time could not speak formal Italian.

“who because he wanted to eat a shoemaker’s pig, had been bedridden for three months moaning and groaning.” He described Guardianu’s illness and ended up making an appointment for the doctor to come and see what he could do for the priest. After they parted, the monk went back to the monastery and told Father Guardianu, and the priest was happy that a doctor was coming to cure him.

The other monks, however, were skeptical, and they even said to the priest, “Oh, Father Guardianu, watch out! It may be that same fellow who pulled you up to Heaven!”

“Oh, no, that’s impossible,” said the monk. “I met the man myself, and there’s no doubt he’s a true gentleman! He had an elegant beard and the manners of a lord.”

“God help us if it’s the shoemaker!” they all said.

“How can it be the shoemaker? This man is rich, and he gave me a generous donation, while the shoemaker is a poor man.”

And so the monks and brothers let themselves be persuaded, and they waited for the doctor to make his visit.

When the doctor arrived, he was received cordially. Since his appearance was that of a gentleman, and he spoke Italian like an educated person, they promptly ushered him into Father Guardianu’s cell, where he found the priest in terrible discomfort.

“My friends,” said the false doctor to the monks, “this man’s condition is dangerous! He has broken bones that require an operation. I must therefore order you all to leave this room since I don’t want any interference. The procedure I am going to use may make him cry out loudly, but you mustn’t pay attention because, after three days, he’ll be fully recovered.”

These words upset the monks, and one of them even went up close to Father Guardianu and whispered in his ear, “I really think this man is the shoemaker.”

“Nonsense,” the priest confidently replied. “This fellow is a total stranger.”

And so the monks had to obey him and evacuate the room, and the fake doctor locked them in a separate chamber, saying he would let them out after Father Guardianu was cured. His next move was to go to every room in the monastery and remove all the items of value, gather them together, and bring them back to his own house. “Look at how much we’ve gotten back for our pig!” he exclaimed to his family. Then he went back again and took everything else he could find in the monastery, leaving its walls stripped entirely bare. Next he entered the church and made off with every precious item of gold and silver. And finally, he returned to the room where Father Guardianu was lying to settle his final account with the priest.

When he entered the room, the priest assumed that he was going to perform an operation. But Master Peppi stripped off the bedcovers, took out a whip he had hidden in his trousers, and gave the priest reason to regret the business of the pig. Guardianu cried for help, but the monks assumed that the more he shouted, the more effectively the cure was working. When the shoemaker had punished him to his heart's content and left him more dead than alive, he made his way home again.

Now it was time, he realized, to relocate his family to keep them safe from any retribution. So they got on horseback and rode until they came to a large city. There they settled and began living a life of extravagance because they now were among the wealthiest families.

Meanwhile, back at the monastery, the monks had grown restless when many hours passed and the doctor didn't return to let them out. So they forced open the door and ran to see what had happened. When they entered Father Guardianu's room, they found him in terrible shape, unable to speak, bleeding from his head and with his bedcovers all soiled with blood. They tried to talk to him, but all he could do was signal with his hand that his life was over and it was time for him to prepare to meet his Maker. "So then it was the shoemaker, after all!" they cried out.

"It was, it was," murmured the priest.

"We said as much!" the monks replied. "We thought the same thing would happen just like the time you ascended to Heaven, and we were right! You wouldn't listen to us, and now look at what's happened."

As the monks began looking around the monastery, they discovered that all the valuables were missing, and they almost died of shock. Then they armed themselves and went looking for the shoemaker, intending to kill him. When they arrived at his house, they found it boarded up, and the neighbors told them that they had seen the whole family leave but had no idea where they had gone. So the monks had to return to their monastery, and all they could do was to weep in pain and in anger. They saw that now they had no means of support and didn't know where their next meal would come from. All they could do was go begging in the streets, and each one was looking more bedraggled than the other. The monastery was less and less able to shelter them because it was now falling into disrepair. So they came up with the idea that they would go from town to town looking for a devout and wealthy person to be their patron.

One day, a monk was walking through one of these towns, and he encountered a certain gentleman. He asked him for alms and recounted the whole tale of what had happened: how Father Guardianu's greed had cost him his health and led to the monastery falling into ruin, all because of a

shoemaker. Well, here I must reveal that this gentleman was, in fact, the shoemaker, who was now a rich baron thanks to all the monastery's wealth he had taken. But now he showed interest in the monks and feigned pity, and even offered to help restore the monastery. The monk was beside himself with joy, thinking that he had found the perfect benefactor! They exchanged friendly compliments and ended with the gentleman promising he would restore the building and make it as good as new.

So this baron returned with the monk to the place where the monastery stood. Once there he made the generous offer to have the building razed to the ground and then rebuilt completely from scratch, so it would be entirely new. He hired master builders to do the job and ordered them to tear down the whole structure and then rebuild it all. They set to work at once, to the satisfaction of this baron and all the monks, and soon the whole building was demolished.

During this first week, the baron had paid the workers their full salary, and after the monastery was reduced to rubble, the workers were eager to start the rebuilding. But there was no baron-shoemaker to be found! Under cover of night he had mounted his horse and ridden away. The workers, who had begun to rebuild, spent a week looking for the baron, with no results. So they said to the monks, "No work for no pay!" and that was the end of that.

The monks went to tell Father Guardianu the bad news, and it dawned on them all that the shoemaker had gotten the best of them once again. "And you," they said to the poor brother who had invited the fake baron, "you are Brother Idiot for having brought him here!" and they gave him a sound thrashing.

Now the sad reality was that this order of monks had all become beggars, without a monastery or any means of feeding themselves. So one day Father Guardianu summoned all the monks and brothers to his room for a conference.

"My good friends," he said, "you can see that in my attempt to help the monastery, I failed you and managed to lose my health as well. The shoemaker was not content merely to play us for fools, but has gone so far as to wreck our livelihood, destroy our building, and make beggars of us all. You are aware of our circumstances, and that the monastery has no future. So, here is what I propose to solve our problems: Let us sell our entire land and give a share of the money to the shoemaker, so that he doesn't end up killing us all off. We can keep the rest of the money for ourselves to live on."

Father Guardianu's proposal was acceptable to all, and within a week the land was sold. Then Father Guardianu called the brother and said to him, "Go to that city where the shoemaker lives and give this money to him on the

condition that he leaves us in peace from this moment on, because we cannot endure his tricks any longer.”

So the next morning the brother left for the city where the baron lived, discovered his residence, and went to call on him. In the entryway facing the door, there was the picture of an old woman painted on the wall. He knocked at the door, and soon as it opened, the baron appeared. The brother, in the name of the monastery, handed him the money and begged him to please leave them in peace from now on, since they were reduced to total poverty. And the baron agreed to do them no further harm, now that he had taught them to fear the very mention of his name.

As they were speaking, the monk kept noticing the opulence of the baron’s quarters, and anger began to gnaw at him, as he realized that this all had been bought with the monastery’s money. Then his eye fell again on the old woman’s picture opposite the door. “Baron, sir,” he inquired, “what is that picture of the old woman doing there opposite the door?”

“That is my grandmother,” replied the Baron. “She didn’t show me sufficient respect, so I gave her such a kick that it flattened her on the wall, and there she remains. Do you need to know anything more?”

“No thank you,” answered the brother. “But now I have to ask a favor of you. Since it’s raining heavily and I’ve come all this way to find you in a faraway city, would you be willing to give me a little shelter for the night, and tomorrow I’ll be on my way?”

At first the baron put on a dour face, but then he felt he couldn’t hold a grudge against this brother. So he led him downstairs and gave him lodging in a room on the ground floor. The brother thanked him, but the poor fellow couldn’t sleep all night, imagining that the baron might also decide to flatten him against the wall, as he had done with his grandmother. So the minute dawn approached, the brother thought he had better claim his freedom, and he forced open the door and took off without even saying goodbye.

He got on his horse and began riding, and all the way home he kept turning his head to make sure that the shoemaker wasn’t following him. He thanked the Lord that he had escaped safely without losing his life!

Upon his return he told his fellow monks and brothers all that had happened to him, and they made a vow that, if they ever saw any shoemakers, they would make the sign of the cross!

A story written, a story told,

Now tell me yours, because mine is old.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 163. THE HEADSTRONG SON

There's a tale told time and again that once upon a time there was a father with a disobedient son who wouldn't listen to anything his father said. If his father shouted at him, he would simply run the other way. Well, one day the son decided to flee his home and go to a town that he had heard people talk about because it was full of frightening criminals and thieves.

The lad set out without a penny in his pocket and with an empty belly to boot, and he arrived as night was falling. Since he had no place to stay, he decided to spend the night in the main church. After he entered, he found a confessional to hide in and was so tired that he soon fell asleep there.

Now it just so happened that on the previous day, a very rich and important prince had died in this town, and after all the appropriate funeral ceremonies they had buried him in one of the crypts of that church. In the middle of the night, around four o'clock, when not even a fly was stirring and the dark was so thick you could cut it with a knife, four thieves assembled outside the church, armed to the teeth and intent on robbery. Their plan was to dig up the prince's body and steal all the jewelry and fancy clothes that his family had buried with him, plus his diamond ring.

With this in mind, the robbers unlocked the church with a passkey they had made, entered, and locked the door behind them. They were startled to hear the sound of a snoring so loud that it sounded like someone sawing wood. Although frightened, they drew out their knives and began searching with a lamp in all the corners, until they discovered the young man asleep. They placed their knives at his throat, and all together they gave out a fierce wolf howl. They scared him so shitless that people still talk about it to this day. They were ready to kill him, but then the leader gave a wink to the others, and they said they would spare his life on the condition that he would climb down into the crypt. A reasonable exchange, thought the young man.

So they used their tools to lift the slab. Then they tied a rope to the youth, handed him a lamp, and lowered him into the crypt. Once he was at the bottom, they had him hand over all the valuables he was stripping from the prince one by one, but when he got to the diamond ring, he refused to hand it over and stuck it in his pocket. And then the thieves—either in retaliation or perhaps they intended this all along—set the slab back in place and sealed that unhappy youth inside the crypt. Imagine people being so heartless as to do that!

Well, the young man was trembling like a leaf, and he searched every corner

looking for a way to get out, but all in vain. Finally, he took a cloak off one of the corpses and covered himself completely. Then he extinguished the lamp and began lamenting as if he were dead and offering his soul to God.

Now it was five o'clock, and a second band of robbers appeared in the forecourt of the church with the same intent of stealing the prince's valuables. They went straight to the crypt, lifted the slab, and one of them went down with a rope. Now the youth, when he heard them approaching, was sure they were his robber companions returning to murder him. So what did he do? He got up his courage, seized a large shin-bone from an old corpse, slid it under his cloak, and was ready to make mincemeat out of anyone who entered. When the first robber came down, he gave him such a whack that he ruptured his kidneys. The man began shouting, "Pull me up, comrades! There are devils down here!" and he couldn't utter another word because of his fright. When the young man saw that the robbers were pulling their friend up, he took hold of the man's knees and was pulled up along with him. When they reached the top and the robbers saw this double body appear, they panicked, let go of the cord, and ran as fast as they could. The youth was quick enough to take hold of the edge of the hole and saved himself, while he dropped the other man—who by now had fainted—down into the crypt.

Now he was free, but he had no idea what to do. It was still night, and he didn't know anybody in town. However, he managed to find a canopy outside a shop where he could sit and wait for dawn. When he had recovered a bit, he began thinking how he would have to find something to eat in the coming day, because hunger was making his belly rumble. As he was nursing these thoughts, two men who were butchers came together under the same canopy, and he overheard their conversation.

"My friend, this is the night when we can steal Don Bartolomeo's pig. It's big and fat and will bring us quite a sum when we divide it."

"Absolutely. You go and tell your wife to start the water boiling while I go kill the animal, load it on my shoulders, and carry it to your house. Let me have your knife, and I'm off."

After this exchange, each man went his separate way. The youth, who had followed this discussion, silently crept out from the canopy and followed the butcher who was going to slaughter the pig, keeping a safe distance. When he saw that he had killed it and had it on his back, he approached in the dark and imitated the voice of the other butcher. In an anxious tone he said, "Oh, my friend, bad news! My wife couldn't find any firewood for heating the water. So give me the pig, and you go home to start heating the water at your house right away."

And so the butcher loaded the pig on the young man's shoulders and ran

off to prepare the water at his own house. Imagine: each man is at home boiling water and waiting for the other to arrive with a pig! They'll be waiting a long time! And when next they meet, they'll be at one another's throats.

Now let's return to the young man. With the pig on his back he went the other way as fast as his feet could carry him.<sup>220</sup> It was now approaching seven o'clock, and by the light of the moon he saw the door of a warehouse, so he knocked.

"At this hour," answered the warehouse watchman, "I don't open for anyone, not even my father!"

"I'll make it worth your while to open up," answered the youth. "I have a whole slaughtered pig with me, and I'll give you all of it except for two ribs if you'll give me a place to sleep until tomorrow morning."

When the watchman heard mention of the pig, he opened at once and let him in.

"My good man," said the youth, "I need a bit of bread, something to drink, and a place to lie down, because I'm worn out with hunger and exhaustion. Tomorrow, when I've had some sleep, we can eat the pig."

The man gave him something to eat and drink, and then said, "You can lie down over there where my son is sleeping." Then he himself went back to sleep.

Well, no more than an hour had gone by when the young man woke up with the need to urinate. He felt his bladder was about to burst, and he woke up the watchman's son to ask him where the urinal was.

"We don't have any urinal," came the reply. "But see over in that corner there's a flask. Just urinate into that, and be careful not to get any on the floor."

So the young man went and found the flask, and filled it to the very brim. But when he went to go back to sleep, the watchman's son said to him, "I just realized that tomorrow my father is planning a trip to the country, and intends to take that flask with him, filled with wine. So here's what you should do. Hit the flask against that stone mortar that's sitting by the door, where my father is sleeping, and we'll pretend that the flask was accidentally broken. Otherwise my father will beat the hell out of the two of us when he wakes up in the morning."

So the young man very carefully crept forward with the flask, intending to break it against the mortar. But just at that moment a ray of moonlight came through a hole in the roof and struck the head of the sleeping watchman,

220 This English idiom translates a much more vivid Sicilian expression, also used elsewhere in these tales to describe hurrying at full speed: *santi pedi, ajutatimi!* (blessed feet, help me!).

which was nearly bald. The light gleaming off that shiny head made it look like the mortar stone, and so *wham!*—he hit it with the flask. Well, you can imagine the man's screams when he felt his head was nearly broken! Everyone began shouting at once, and the youth was lucky enough to find a way out the door as fast as his feet could carry him.<sup>221</sup>

Once he was safely out of town, he stopped and thought to himself, "If so many bad things could happen to me in that place while it was still night, imagine what would have followed during the day! I'm better off returning to my own little house and making peace with my father."

And that's what the young man did.

So he lived on, happy and content,

While we remain here without a cent.

*Told by the seamstress Giovannina La Pipparella to M. Messina Faulisi in Alimena.*

## 164. THE THREE HUNCHBACKS

**O**nce upon a time there was a husband and a wife, and they had a daughter. The husband was a hunchback. One day he had to depart to take care of some business. But his very first thought was to make sure that his wife took care of their daughter.

"My dear wife," he said, "whatever our little daughter desires, anything that she wants while I am gone, you're to give to her."

The father departed, and his wife remained with their daughter. One day the little girl went to her mother and said that she desired to see her father again and began to weep.

"I want papa! I want papa! I want papa!"

Recalling the words of her husband who had said that she was supposed to give their daughter anything that their daughter wanted, the wife took the girl by the hand and went to Quattro Cantoni where she stopped at a certain place and waited for the first hunchback to pass by. When one arrived, she stopped him and said, "Sir, may I have a word with you?"

"What would you like?"

"I have a husband who is just like you. He had to go on a trip, and the first thing that he told me before he departed was to look after our daughter and to

221 Again, "*santi pedi, ajutatimi!*"

give her whatever she desired. Now the girl has been crying all the time because she wants to see her father. You would do me a great favor if you come to my house and stay with us. . . . That way the girl would think she has her papa and will be content."

"With pleasure," the hunchback said. "What time do you want me to come?"

"At one in the afternoon," she responded.

"All right."

The hunchback took his leave and departed. However, the wife was not content and wanted to wait and see if another hunchback might pass by. And when another did come by, she stopped him and had the same conversation with him that she had with the first one. Then he asked, "What time do you want me to come?"

"At two in the afternoon," she responded.

But she was not content with having two, so she waited for another hunchback to pass by. Indeed, another hunchback came, and she stopped him and had the same conversation that she had held with the other two. And this hunchback also asked, "What time do you want me to come?"

"At three in the afternoon."

After she had taken care of everything, she returned to her home with the girl. At exactly one o'clock, the first hunchback arrived carrying sweets and cakes. When he entered, he took the girl in his arms and began to caress her. After an hour passed, someone knocked at the door. The mother became very confused and said to the hunchback, "It's my husband! My husband!" she cried out. "You know what I'm going to do? I'll put you in this closet, and when he goes into the next room, I'll let you out."

The poor hunchback got into the closet, very frightened and breathless. The second hunchback entered and picked up the girl in his arms and gave her all the things that he had brought with him. The girl was very happy. Meanwhile two hours had passed, and there was a *knock, knock* at the door! The wife became very confused and said the same thing that she had said to the first hunchback. And he, too, had to get into the closet without uttering a peep. Now the third hunchback entered and was loaded with gifts. He picked up the girl and began fondling her. Meanwhile, the wife prepared him a nice meal, and they sat down at the table. But just as he took his first bite, the church bell began to sound four o'clock.

"Oho!" the wife said. "What a disaster! It's four o'clock, and my husband is going to come! It's best if you get into that closet, and when my husband goes to bed to rest, I'll open the door and let you out so that you can get out of here."

The three poor hunchbacks remained locked in the closet and were squeezed as tight as sardines in a barrel. Since they were frightened, they didn't dare make a sound. In the meantime, the wife went to clean up and rest with her daughter, and the three poor hunchbacks were sticking each other and bruising each other with their ugly humps. The next day she opened the closet and took out one of the men. Then she stuck him into a sack, tied it very tightly, and called a boy to come over to her house.

"If you go and throw this sack into the sea," she said, "I'll give you ten coins when you return."

The boy was content with the deal, lifted the sack on his back, and went to throw it into the sea. But when he returned for his money, she said to him, "Did you throw it into the sea?"

"Yes, I threw it."

"You're not telling the truth because he came back, and I have him here in this sack. If you don't throw it much better this time, I won't give you the ten coins I promised you."

The boy lifted the sack onto his back and went to throw it into the sea much further than the first time.

"Now let's see if he returns this time!" he said to himself.

So he returned to the woman and told her that he had thrown the sack into the sea at a spot much deeper than the first one.

"No, you didn't!" she replied. "He's returned. Where did you throw him? He's returned."

Once again he carried the sack and went to a spot much further out along the seashore. While he was walking, he met a hunchback who was heading toward the woman's house. As soon as he saw him, he cried out, "Ah! You rascal! You're returning again? You want to make me take another trip?"

He struck him on the head with a stick and quickly took him and threw him into the sack. Then he picked it up and carried it on his back to the shore where he dumped the sack into the sea.

"Now let's see if you return!" he said, and happy as a lark he returned to the lady.

"Lady, if you only knew . . . he was coming back again. But as soon as I saw him I hit him in the head with a stick. Then I quickly stuck him into the sack, ran to the shore, and threw him into the sea."

The woman realized that it was her husband who was returning home. But without opening her mouth, she took the ten coins and gave them to him.

*Collected by Carmelo Pardi in Palermo.*

## 165. BROTHER GHINIPARO

Once upon a time there was a husband and a wife, rich but without children, and a certain monk by the name of Brother Ghiniparo went in and out of their house as their friend.

Now, one fine day a rumor reached the husband's ears that his wife was amusing herself with this saintly monk. Each time that the husband went to work in the fields, these two cooked a pot of macaroni and brazenly ate together. Just think of how tormented the husband became if not furious when he heard this news! So, the husband came with a mason on the sly and had him make a little window right behind the stove, saying that it was to get rid of the smoke more easily. After the mason left, the husband took leave of his wife and went off into the fields.

Later that afternoon, Brother Ghiniparo and the lady went to make their macaroni as usual and set a pot of water on top of the stove. Brother Ghiniparo put the wood into the stove, and when the water began to boil, he cried out, "It's boiling, it's boiling! Come here, my little Vincenza, and throw the macaroni in."

At this point, the husband, who had been hiding behind the window and had heard everything, stuck out his arm and poured the pot of boiling water on Brother Ghiniparo.

*Swish swash! Swish swash!*

Brother Ghiniparo stretched out his legs and died.

"Eeeee! Poor me!" Lady Vincenza exclaimed. "What am I going to do with this corpse in the house. If the police find out . . . !

She immediately called her maid and sent her to fetch the undertaker.

"My friend, Signor Calogero, if you get rid of the corpse inside, I'll give you whatever you want."

"But what if I bump into the police?"

"Please, signore, do me this favor. Don't hesitate."

"Well, if you want me to help you get away with this, you'll have to give me ten gold coins."

"Ten gold coins?"

"My lady, either I take the body, or you go your own way."

Lady Vincenza was compelled to give him the ten coins, and the undertaker carried off Brother Ghiniparo on his two feet.

"Where shall I go?" he asked himself. "Where should I bring him?"

He approached the walls of the convent garden, where he saw an outhouse.

So he carried the corpse into the outhouse, stuck Brother Ghiniparo on top of a toilet, said good night, sweet dreams and left!

Now, Brother Paolino, the gardener, had eaten a lot of beans and broccoli that night and had a bad stomach. He ran to the outhouse, and before he entered, he looked carefully because the rules of the convent demanded that only one person at a time could enter. Well, what did he see but another monk.

“Psst! Psst! Brother!” he whispered. “Please be quick! I’ll wait here.”

But whom was he talking to? The wall?

“Psst! Psst! Brother, hurry up!”

Well, Brother Paolino lost his patience. He took off a sandal and threw it at Brother Ghiniparo, who fell out like a corpse that had been dead twenty years.”

“Oh! My God! What have I done?” Brother Paolino began weeping, and swift as he could he ran to the undertaker.

“My friend Calogero, come, quick! You’ve got to save my life! I threw a sandal at Brother Ghiniparo, and he fell to the ground. I swear to you, my friend, I didn’t mean to do it. If you don’t save me, I’m dead.”

“But, my brother, what if I come across the guards?”

“You’ll think of a way out. Just help me get rid of the corpse, and tell me what I should pay you.”

“All right, how about twenty gold coins?”

“Where do you think I can get that amount?”

“What do you want me to tell you, brother? Rob the convent and give me the money. Do you think that I’m going to carry a dead body at midnight for anything less than that?”

In short, Brother Paolino managed to find the money here and there, and Calogero took charge of the body. He carried it to the corner of a street where there was a butcher shop. All of a sudden he had an idea. He sat the monk down behind the shop door, placed a plate on his knees, and made it seem that he was begging for money. Then he left.

Shortly after eight, some thieves arrived at the shop to steal two pigs that were hanging inside and had been slaughtered the night before. As they approached, one of them said.

“Hey, we’re in a jam!” one of them said. “There’s someone right behind the door!”

“Who is it?”

“A monk.”

“What’s he doing?”

“He’s got a plate on his knees. Maybe he’s expecting some meat.”

"Ah, what a rotten deal! I think it's time that he takes a nap. Just wait, I'll put him to sleep!"

The thief took a large stick, struck Brother Ghiniparo on the head, and the monk rolled over on to the ground. So now the thieves pushed open the door, pulled the two pigs from the hooks, and hung Brother Ghiniparo by his neck on one of the hooks.

Early the next morning the butcher arrived and found the door pushed open. He entered the shop and found Brother Ghiniparo hanging nicely on a hook used for the pigs. He slapped his head and ran straight to the undertaker.

"Here are twenty gold coins, my friend," he said. "Get rid of that beast hanging in my shop."

"My friend, since it's you, I'll help you, and since it's you, you've got to give me forty gold coins. That's the least thanks you can give me at this time of the morning."

"Here, take it. Forty gold coins. Just get rid of the corpse."

Once again the undertaker took charge of Brother Ghiniparo. This time he ran to the river outside the town and threw him into it. Just by chance a poor fisherman happened to throw his nets into the river about this time. No sooner were the nets in the water than he felt a weight and began to pull and pull.

"Oh, how heavy they are!" he cried out. "They must already be filled with fish."

He kept pulling until out came Brother Ghiniparo.

"A curse on the soul of these monks!" the fisherman exclaimed, and he searched for a dump heap where he could leave the corpse because he didn't want the fish to eat baptized flesh. As he was scavenging in the dump heap a bit, he discovered two pieces of pork that were hidden there. They were the same ones that the thieves had stolen. They had hidden two halves there, and the rest they had carried to their nearby camp. Summoning his courage, the fisherman pulled out the pieces of pork, replaced them with the corpse, and ran as fast as he could toward his home.

In the meantime the thieves returned. They had come for the pieces of pork and found the monk that they had met during the night.

"Who carried him here? It's magic!"

They were afraid to touch him, and to get rid of the corpse, one of them went to fetch the undertaker.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it's almost daylight, and I'm afraid of the police. But you want me to get rid of this corpse for you, don't you? Give me a hundred gold coins, and I'll do it."

Because they were so frightened, the thieves paid the undertaker, who took

charge of the body once more, and since he liked the idea very much, he went and threw the corpse into Lady Vincenza's courtyard just about the time that her maid got up to sweep it.

"Eeeee! Signora! Brother Ghiniparo is here again!"

The lady was bewildered and summoned the undertaker once more.

"Quick, get rid of this body! Who carried it here?"

"My lady, some devil must have done it because I threw it into the river. Don't you see that he's returned here by himself? Now I'm afraid to touch it."

"Get it out of here! It's already daylight. I'll give you whatever you want!"

"My lady, this is a delicate affair. I'm afraid of him, and I'm also afraid of the police because it's daylight already . . . But, all right, give me two hundred gold coins, and I'll risk my life for yours."

He took the two hundred gold coins and began once more to carry Brother Ghiniparo on his back. Once he reached the convent garden wall, he unloaded him at the gate to the garden and departed. Just at that moment, Brother Paolino entered the garden, and upon seeing that Brother Ghiniparo was still there, he made the sign of the cross. Since he didn't have any more money, and since it was already day, what was he going to do? Well, he picked up the body, carried it to his cell, and laid it down to rest on his bed. Then he covered him with a woolen blanket and set fire to it.

"Brother Ghiniparo's burning!" he cried out. "Brother Ghiniparo's burning!"

All the monks came running and put out the fire. When they found Brother Ghiniparo burned to a crisp, they all said, "What a misfortune! What a misfortune!"


And that's how the story about Brother Ghiniparo finished.

Whoever told the tale, and whoever had the tale told,

Won't suffer death until he gets old.

*Told by Francesca Leto to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 166. THREE GOOD FRIENDS

nce upon a time there were three good friends. When a holiday came and they found themselves with free time on their hands, they got together, and after the appropriate greetings and exchanges, they thought about the best way to use their time. They decided they would go on an outing for fun and bring their wives along as well.

So they all met at the appointed time and set off for the countryside. When they came to a nice spot, they sat down and had their lunch. Then, having nothing else planned, they decided by common consent that the men would go off hunting in that region to catch some thrushes or other small prey, and then make a meal together with their wives.

After the men had gone off, the wives at first remained sitting there by themselves. Then they set out walking to see what this area was like, conversing as they went. Suddenly their eyes all fell on the same spot where a precious gem was lying on the ground and sparkling in the sunlight. All three bent down at the same time, each trying to be the first to pick it up and ready to argue about possession. One woman succeeded in picking it up first and showed the jewel to her companions, who were dazzled by its brilliance. The one who picked it up claimed it was hers, but the other two insisted that it belonged to all three of them equally because they had all seen it at the same time.

Well, they argued back and forth with no results, until by common consent they agreed to take it to the town's lawyer and let him decide. They also swore to keep the matter secret from their husbands. So they fixed a time when they would all be free to go into town and consult the lawyer and accept his decision. In the meantime, the jewel would remain in the hands of the woman who had picked it up.

Shortly after they finished making this plan, their husbands returned carrying what they had caught and asked the wives to prepare the food as soon as possible because they were quite hungry. The men sat down and, being hot and sweaty, passed around the wine flask and began drinking, while the women worked quickly at preparing the meal. Soon they were all eating together and talking about what they had done.

Well, the time passed and the sun was setting, and by eleven o'clock they were on their horses and heading back to town. Since everyone was tired, and the husbands all were at home, there was no way for the wives to carry out their plan to visit the lawyer, so they decided to do it the following day.

The next morning the husbands, as usual, went to the country to supervise the field hands, leaving their wives at home, and the three women quickly came together to pursue their plan. They went straight to the lawyer's house and told him the whole story. The lawyer agreed that all three women had equal rights, but the problem was that the jewel could not be divided. Therefore, his advice was to select one of the three as the owner, but in the following manner.

"You told me," said the lawyer, "that you are all married, and your husbands know nothing of this matter. My idea is to give the jewel to whichever

of you does the best job of making a complete fool of your husband. You can have three days to carry this out with the condition that I myself will decide which trick was the best and who gets the jewel.”

The three women were pleased with the plan. They left the jewel with the lawyer and agreed to come back to him in three days’ time. Then each woman went to her own house and began working on a plan to make a complete fool of her husband.

The first woman did the following. When her husband came home, she decided to tell him his breath stank and she didn’t want him near her.

“Phew! What terrible breath! What a stink! Keep your distance, please.”

Her husband replied that he hadn’t noticed anything, and this must just be an odd notion of hers.

“Not at all,” she replied. “It’s impossible to get close to you. I’m dying from the stench!”

“Hmm,” he said. “I think this is just something you’re making up this evening. Now that we’ve had so many children, you’re claiming I have bad breath, although it didn’t bother you in the past. Anyway, enough of this. I’m ready for dinner, I’m tired, and I want to go to bed.”

And so the woman got out the dinner she had prepared and continued the game she was playing. When her husband asked her why she wasn’t eating, she answered that she was repelled by the terrible smell that was coming from his mouth.

“Hey! What’s gotten into you this evening? Are you looking for a beating?” he asked. But the woman insisted that she couldn’t eat.

“Well, then, take your plate and eat in the other room!”

“No, I’m just not feeling very well this evening.”

“All right, then, I’ll eat by myself. This thing is driving me crazy.”

And the man finished his dinner and went to bed without giving it any further thought. His wife lay down to sleep on the other side of the bed and refused to turn toward him all night long.

The next morning she got up early to wait for the housekeeper to arrive so she could warn her in advance. She told her the trick she was playing and made her agree to go along with the deception so that her husband would be convinced. The housekeeper entered the bedroom as the husband was waking up, and she found an excuse to get close to the bed. Then, as soon as he spoke, she told him that she couldn’t be near him because of his bad breath.

“That makes two of you!” he exclaimed. “Well, let’s see if we can find a third who thinks the same thing!”

“But I tell you it’s really impossible to get close to you,” said the housekeeper. “I think you must have some kind of scurvy in your teeth.”

"That's right," added the wife, "that's what it must be!"

By this time the man could no longer stand the constant complaining and misery in his house, with a wife no longer willing to eat or sleep with him, and he decided to send for the tooth-extractor and have his teeth pulled out, molars and all. So that's what he did, and he now looked like a toothless old man who was no longer able to chew. His wife couldn't be more pleased and told him that now it was very pleasant to talk with him, because his breath no longer smelled.

Now we can leave this husband without his teeth and turn to the next woman who was eager to have the jewel. Her plan, as soon as her husband had left the house, was the following. She gathered several people and set up a trattoria in front of her house, the kind they have in Palermo, equipped with every possible item. She brought in a huge number of pots and pans and kitchen implements, and waiters who walked back and forth serving from the grill and calling out, "Come and eat here! Come and drink here!"<sup>222</sup>

Eventually the husband came home and was startled to discover this whole arrangement in front of his house. The waiters asked him, "What would you like? Pasta, fish, an omelet, or perhaps some sweets?"

He replied that he didn't want to eat and to excuse him for having come in, because it looked like the entryway to his own house. So he left and went to another street to look for his house. But then he thought about it and realized that he had been at the right house. So, he went back, and this time he went in the door. Waiters circled him at once, asking to take his order, but he said he wasn't there to eat and had again mistaken this for his own house. So he went out again and took a good look. "I'll be damned if these aren't my own front windows. Have I lost my mind this evening, or is it just that I can't see straight? I'm going back in, and this time I'm ready to pick a fight."

As soon as he entered, the waiters said, "So you're back again? And you don't wish to order a meal? Then what is it you want?"

"I'm sorry, there's nothing I want. You'll just have to pardon me for mistaking my own front door three times."

So he went out again, and decided to go to his brother-in-law's house, describe the whole confusing situation to him, and ask to spend the night there. When he knocked on the door, his sister opened, saw him, and asked what the matter was. He described the whole upsetting business to them, and

222 Pitrè notes that such public criers were familiar figures in the simple trattorias and taverns of Sicily. He adds a footnote with a comic story from Polizzi-Generosa about a villager who comes to Palermo and eats in such a trattoria, pretending that he understood the crier's call as an invitation to a free meal.

his brother-in-law offered to go back with him to see if the same thing happened. So they went back together to the man's house.

"Is this really my house?" he asked his brother-in-law. "If it is, how come I don't see my wife here or my children, and they send me away saying this is a trattoria?"

"Let me knock on the door," said his brother-in-law, "and we'll see what they say to me."

So he knocked, and the waiters opened the door at once and asked what these gentlemen would like to eat. The brother-in-law answered that he wasn't there to eat but was looking for his sister's house. The waiters replied that this wasn't a private residence but a trattoria, and they knew nothing about a brother or sister. And so the brother-in-law excused himself and left. The waiters said to one another—and in a haughty tone that the two men could hear—"These two fellows must be either crazy or drunk!"

When the two men heard this, they decided that they shouldn't bother the waiters anymore that evening. The brother-in-law suggested they spend the night at his house and re-think the whole matter. "Don't worry," he assured the man who couldn't find his own house, "tomorrow morning I'll help you find your house in the daylight." So they returned and recounted all that had happened to the brother-in-law's wife (who was the man's sister). And then they went to sleep for the night.

Meanwhile, what about the wife of the man who could not find his own house? Well, she laughed when she heard about his perplexity. Then she gave orders to remove all the restaurant furnishings before the next day dawned, so that her husband could come back into his house as he always had, and the men carried everything away. The next morning the man said goodbye to his sister and brother-in-law and set out for his house. He arrived and looked at the windows to see if they were the same as last night, when he had wandered into a trattoria by mistake. Then he opened the door and looked inside, but he saw nobody there. He went in, still perplexed at how he could have made that mistake the previous night. "Maybe I really was drunk," he thought to himself.

As soon as he went upstairs and his wife saw him, she began berating him for not coming home last night. "You don't realize what happened to me!" he retorted. "I came here three times, and each time I found a trattoria and waiters who kept sending me away."

Well, each one heard the other out, and eventually the two of them made peace.

Now it was left for the third wife to play her trick on her husband. So what do you think she did? She knew her husband was a great devotee of the

Capuchin monks, and he always gave them meals and alms when they asked. "The best plan would be to get in cahoots with the monk and play such a trick on my husband as will be remembered for all time."

So she called a monk, told him the whole story, and promised him a tidy sum if he would help her make a total fool of her husband. Her idea was to drug her husband with opium and have him fall asleep in one place and wake up in a totally different place.

So, using the pretext that he was going to take the husband on a pleasure trip to the countryside, the monk waited for the man at his home. When the man came in and they had exchanged courtesies, they made an appointment to meet at a certain time, and after the monk went off and prepared the food, wine, and opium, he returned to fetch him, and they set off. When they were in the countryside, the monk made him walk a lot as part of the outing. Then when it was getting late and the man was tired, the monk put opium in the wine and gave it to him to drink. When it began to grow dark, they decided to go back to the man's house, where the wife was waiting. The monk gave the woman a sign that he had carried out the plan and in another half hour her husband would be sound asleep. Soon the man fell into a deep slumber, and the wife urged the monk to carry out the rest of the plan, and tomorrow she would give him a handsome payment. So the monk lifted the man and carried him to the monastery. He opened the door and carried him in without anyone noticing, brought him to his cell, laid him in his bed, and dressed him in monk's robes. Then the monk lay down as well with his head on the pillow.

At about seven in the morning, the man began to wake up and rolled over to the other side of the bed, stretching out his arm for his wife and saying, "Ah, my dear wife." Since he hadn't opened his eyes yet, he thought he was still in his own house with his wife in bed next to him. Imagine his amazement when he kept feeling with his hand and discovered that, instead of his wife, he was fondling the beard of a monk! The monk began screaming loudly in order to scare him, and the frightened man jumped out of bed. He looked at himself and found he was dressed in a monk's habit and there was a monk lying in the bed. He stared at him wide-eyed and asked why he was there and dressed like this, when he had retired the previous evening in his own bed at home. The monk replied that on the previous evening the man had died, and they had brought him here for his last rites. They had dressed him in monk's robes to honor the great affection he had always shown for the monks and their monastery. The monk continued to act astonished and asked the man how it could be that he died last night but had now come back to life.


"How would I know?" the man replied. "But now that I am alive, just let me go back to my own house and try to figure things out."

So he took off the monk's robes, put back his own clothes, and returned home. Once he was there, he was sick from the terrible scare he had had.

And so now each of the three wives had carried out their trick and made great fools of their husbands, and they were eager to learn who had done the best trick. They met the next day, without their husbands knowing it, and went to the lawyer and told him their stories. The lawyer enjoyed hearing all three tales. He liked the trick with the trattoria, and he also liked the trick with the monk, but he judged the best trick to be the one with the molars. This was because the man who couldn't find his own house did find it the following day, and the man who found himself in monk's robes, although he did get sick, was soon back to normal. But the man who had all his teeth removed was left without any recourse whatsoever. And so he gave the jewel to the wife who had thought up that trick.

*Collected by Giuseppe Vincenzo Marotta in Cerda.*

## 167. THE FORTUNE-TELLER

nce upon a time, so the story goes, there was a poor peasant who was saddled with a very large family and had no prospects for getting ahead in the world like other folk. His sole asset was a tiny plot of land, and one day, when he had nothing to do indoors, he went out to work with a hoe. As he was hoeing his small property, his mind dwelt constantly on his poverty, and he kept lamenting the fact that fortune had never shone on him.

Now it happened that, as he was hoeing, a big black adder came out of the ground and began writhing in front of him. Since this man had been asking for fortune to visit him, he began shouting that this must be it, and the adder was going to make him rich. He immediately caught it by wrapping his cloak around it and then went home to show it to his family.

Well, his wife and children couldn't help but laugh when they realized he intended to go from town to town with this snake as a way to make his fortune. But the man was determined, and his next act was to buy a small box and place the adder inside. Then he took leave of his wife and children—who complained loudly that he shouldn't go—and he set out with the box on his shoulders.

As he proceeded down the road, he met a captain accompanied by some officials. Now the name of this poor peasant was Griddu Pintu, which means

Spotted Cricket.<sup>223</sup> When the captain saw him approaching, he immediately took him to be one of those traveling hucksters who pose as fortune-tellers. He told the officials he was going to have some fun with this charlatan, and he bent down, picked up a cricket, and hid it in his hand. Then he and the officials sat down to wait for the man to come by.

As the man passed, he gave them a respectful greeting, but the captain called out to him saying,

“What are you doing here? What business are you pursuing?”

“I am a poor wandering fortune-teller,” he replied, “trying to make a living and to keep from starving to death.”

“Well, then,” said the captain, “since you are a fortune-teller, you can guess what object I’m holding in my hand. And if you guess wrong, you’ll pay sorely for it.”

The would-be fortune-teller was seized with fear and blurted out, “Oh, poor Spotted Cricket, what hands you’ve fallen into!” Of course he meant these words for himself, because he was scarcely out of his house and had fallen into dangerous hands. But the captain remained wonderstruck, and opening his hand he showed the cricket. “Congratulations! Wonderful!” cried all the officials. And the captain took out his purse and gave the fortune-teller a handsome reward. The man swelled up with pride and bragged to them that he was so skilled at this science that there was nothing he couldn’t guess. Then he thanked them and bade them goodbye, continuing down the road until he should arrive at another town. And as he walked along, he was saying, “Oh my lovely little adder, my marvelous helper! By finding you, I found my fortune. Oh, how I love my little black adder!”

He walked until he came to the next town, which was also the town where the captain and the officials lived. Now the captain’s wife happened to be pregnant, and when he heard the fortune-teller was in town, he sent for him at once. The fortune-teller could not refuse and was in fact happy that they had a good opinion of him, while at the same time he was nervous about showing up because, if he couldn’t supply what the captain wanted, they might have him shot. “So be it!” he said to himself. “Everything went well the first time, and I have to assume it also will go well the second time.”

The captain’s orderly met him and brought him to the captain, who received him courteously and offered him a seat. After a short pause, the captain said, “The fact is that I have a pregnant wife, and I’m dying of curiosity to know if the child is going to be a boy or a girl.”

223 Sicilian *griddu* (Italian *grillo*) means cricket, which is essential for the ploy that follows. The teller has waited until this scene to introduce his character’s name at a strategic moment.

Well, this caused Pintu to scratch his head in perplexity. To himself he said, "This has to come out exactly right, or else I'm done for." Then to the captain he replied, "Captain, sir, would you please ask your wife to come out so I can look at her?"

Well, the captain's wife knew about this fortune-teller, and she came out and walked around so he could look, while the captain was expecting him to give an answer. Then the fortune-teller asked the woman to walk around the room a bit, so that he could investigate what they wanted to know. Consequently, she walked first this way, and he observed her right side, then the other way, and he observed her left side. Thereupon he declared that she would give birth to a girl. Now the captain was looking at him and thinking that the man was making fun of him. "What kind of foolishness is this?" he exclaimed. "Do you realize that if you're not telling the truth, your head will roll?"

So Pintu had the woman walk around again, and this time he said that from one side it seemed to be a boy, but from the other side it looked like a girl. Now the captain was thoroughly upset, and he ordered the man to put in jail at once and kept there until his wife gave birth, so he could see what the truth really was.

At this point the false fortune-teller felt desperate and was certain that he was about to lose his life. But ten days later the captain's wife gave birth, and it turned out that she had both a boy and a girl. The captain was totally amazed. Summoning all the officials, he announced to them that the man was not a charlatan but a genuine fortune-teller. Then he ordered Pintu released from prison and brought to him at once. When the guards led him into the room, he was surprised to hear a great round of applause and shouts of "Hooray!" He asked the captain what this was all about, and the captain complimented him for having predicted the birth with perfect accuracy.

Then the fortune-teller was shown the two babies, and he swelled up with pride. With renewed confidence he said to the captain, "You can see now how accurate I was. That's why I said that, when she walked one way, it looked like a girl, and when she walked the other way, it looked like a boy."

"Yes," replied the captain, "I now have the highest regard for your abilities," and he gave him another monetary reward. The news of this success swept the town, and now everybody wanted to meet the great fortune-teller.

At about the same time someone had stolen the queen's diamond ring. There was no clue as to who had done it or how, and the king was violently upset about it. When word of the theft reached the captain's ear, he went at once to the king and assured him that the ring would be found, because now they had a marvelous fortune-teller living in town who had already

demonstrated his excellent talents. The king immediately gave orders to find this man and bring him to the palace, and so they did.

Now I forgot to say that it was wintertime and raining heavily, and so the poor fortune-teller was drenched when he arrived. The king ordered his servants to bring the man whatever he needed to be dry and comfortable, and the visitor asked to have a fire and a good bottle of wine to restore himself properly. These items were brought, and the man was left by himself in an empty room. He removed his clothes and hung them on a line that was there, and then set the brazier underneath. As his trousers were drying in the heat, they began waving back and forth. As he waited for the fire to do its job, he kept looking at the trousers and saying, "It won't do you much good to go back and forth like that, because tomorrow will see shit in those pants."

This went on for some time, and the servants, who were walking back and forth outside the room, couldn't help overhearing these words. Indeed, these very servants were the ones who had stolen the ring. So, when they heard the fortune-teller speaking this way, they were sure the words were meant for them.

"Do you hear what he's saying?" they said to one another. "He's referring to us! He's predicting the trouble we're going to be in tomorrow."

Having heard him say those words several times, the servants became convinced that they wouldn't be able to keep their theft a secret any longer, and they were frightened at the punishment that awaited them. So they went into the room and begged the fortune-teller to please take pity on them. They would give him the ring, they said, if he would save their lives by not revealing who had stolen it. "We are in your hands," they said, "and we recognize your great talent, which seems to have no limits."

"Fine," replied the fortune-teller. "By giving me the ring today, you've avoided the king's punishment that was coming to you tomorrow, and I am ready to save your lives. If you follow my instructions, not a hair on your head will be touched."

"What are your instructions?" they asked.

"Go fetch the black goose that's out in the courtyard, take it to a secluded spot, and make it swallow the ring. If you don't do this, there's no way your lives can be spared."

So they went at once to the courtyard, got the black goose, and made it swallow the ring. When they came back and told the fortune-teller they had done it, he said he needed nothing else from them, and they were free to leave. You can imagine their gratitude as they departed!

When the fortune-teller was alone again, he began laughing to himself. "That makes three times now that I've managed to pull it off successfully.

Who would have thought that by talking to myself I was finding the solution to my problem?"

And so he was able to go to sleep easily with the happy thought that tomorrow he would be receiving a big reward from the king.

The next day dawned, and the king sent at once for the fortune-teller, saying that if he wasted any more time they would cut off his head. The man replied that there was no reason for the king to get upset because he had already learned where the ring was.

"Are you saying you've already found it?" asked the king.

"Indeed I have."

"Then let's go and get it!" said the king.

"Now your Majesty is about to see a truly curious phenomenon," replied the fortune-teller. "Would you permit me, in your name, to give an order to this servant?"

"Yes, permission is granted," answered the king.

"You must go into the courtyard and bring me the black goose that is there," the fortune-teller said to the servant. So, the man went down, found the goose, and brought it back to him. Once he had the goose in his hand, he asked the king if he was willing to kill the goose to get back the ring.

"Ah!" said the king. "Is the ring inside the goose? Did this goose eat the ring?"

"Yes, indeed," answered the fortune-teller. "This goose was the thief."

"Then by all means kill it!" ordered the king.

So the fortune-teller gave the goose to the servants and told them to cut off its head. After they cut off its head, they took a knife and slit open its throat, and that's where they found the ring. They took a basin, gave it a thorough washing, and handed it over to the queen, who felt as if a miracle had taken place.

Now the king held the fortune-teller in the highest possible esteem, and he wine and dined him and gave him a permanent place at his court. And so Pintu was able to summon all his family to join him, and he enjoyed good fortune second to none from this time on.

A story written, a story told,

Now tell me yours, because my tale is old.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 168. THE PRINCE

Once upon a time there was—as we like to say in Palermo—a prince, and he made a public announcement that he was looking for a coachman. You can just imagine how many men came running and offering their services to the prince with all kinds of polite manners and bowing!

“There’s no need to bow before me,” was the prince’s response. “What I require is that you accept the following condition: if you become my coachman and one of my horses dies, you must die at the same time, because I’ll have you put to death.”

“Fine!” replied the applicant who stood before him, eager to have the job. “If this is your Excellency’s condition, then I accept.”

So the agreement was drawn up and the man took up the position of coachman.

Well, with the passage of time the horses grew old, and the coachman began to feel very anxious. “Now that the horses are old and in danger of dying, I fear that my own death is approaching quickly.”

To make a long story short, one morning when the coachman entered the stables, he discovered a dead horse and burst into tears at the sight of it.

“What ever shall I do?” he cried out.

Quickly he decided to seek advice from the other members of the prince’s staff, and they all advised him to go directly to the prince and tell him what had happened because the prince wasn’t really a bad fellow. The coachman was naïve and all too ready to take this advice, and therefore, he went before the prince and said, “Your Excellency, I have to confess that your horse is dead.”

“Dead?” replied the prince. “You’re saying he’s dead? My horse isn’t eating, drinking, or sleeping.”

“Therefore he’s dead,” said the coachman.

“No, that’s what you’re saying,” replied the prince. “But what I’m saying is that my horse is not eating, drinking, or sleeping.”

“Well, if that’s the way your Excellency wants it, it’s fine with me, and now I can leave.”

“Oh, no you can’t,” said the prince, “because now I have to determine your punishment.”

Upon saying that, the prince ordered that the man be shot. The order was carried out at once, and so ends the tale of that unfortunate coachman.

The next thing the prince did was to engage another coachman with the

same stipulation. Time passed, a horse died, and this man too, poor soul, had to die.

Well, the next man hired happened to be a shrewd little fellow, and he took the time to figure out in advance what he would say to the prince in case one of the horses died. Then he went to the prince, agreed to the job and the salary, and was asked to accept the same condition, that when a horse died he would die too. "Fine!" he said. "I have no problem with that."

Well, many days went by, and the prince grew very fond of this coachman. When they went out for a carriage ride, the prince delighted in his horses, noticing how plump and healthy they were. With the passage of time, however, one of the horses happened to die. Consequently, the coachman went straight to the prince and made the following announcement:

"Your Excellency, you have a horse in your stable that is neither eating nor drinking nor sleeping."

"Then he must be dead," replied the prince.

"Oh, no, sir," answered the coachman. "Those are your Excellency's words. What I said was that he isn't eating, drinking, or sleeping."


The prince looked at him closely, and realizing that this man was even cleverer than he was, he spared his life. And so our story is a good example of the expression, "outfoxing the fox."

A story written, a story told,

Now tell me yours, because my tale is old.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 169. NEVER TRUST A WOMAN!

nce upon a time there was a husband and wife, and you couldn't say which of them loved the other more. The wife would follow the husband around the house all day giving him licks and kisses, and the husband was accustomed to saying to his friends, "You can't imagine what a rare and wonderful wife I have! She loves me more than she loves her own eyes."

His close friend, who was a man of the world, responded, "Would you be willing to bet that this love of hers is nothing more than words?"

"Oh, what are you saying?"

"Maybe you'd let yourself be convinced by men who've had a lot more experience than you do? I can get you to see the truth."

"How so? I've seen the truth of her love with my own eyes!"

"Just do the following. Go to the Vucceria<sup>224</sup> and buy a goat's head with the blood still running from it, bring it home, and tell your wife that you've committed a murder. If her love for you is true, she won't be upset a bit or speak a word. But if she is disturbed, it will show that all her loving words and actions cannot come from the heart."

So the husband went to the market and bought the goat's head, wrapped it up in a large handkerchief, and entered his house with a worried look on his face. When his wife asked him what he was carrying in the handkerchief, he answered, "What business is it of yours? Leave me alone! I've committed a murder."

"Who did you kill?"

"That's my business!" he replied, and pushed her away.

Well, the wife now showed her temper as well and said to him,

"Listen here! What sort of game are you playing? I too know how to act!"

And in her indignation she ran straight to the courthouse.

Meanwhile, her husband had thrown the head down the well. Soon after, a judge showed up his house to ask what he had done with the head. The man was startled, and the pipe fell from his mouth as he answered, "My lord, I threw it down the well."

And so they called one of those men who clean out wells, and the fellow climbed down. He looked to the left and to the right, and finally he grasped a pair of horns and shouted, "He's wearing horns!"<sup>225</sup>

"Bring that head up here!"

"Here it is!" and with these words they saw a goat's head appear.

Well, the judge stood transfixed as if he were a statue, and the wife's lack of trust was fully unveiled. And that's how the husband learned to see clearly how much his wife loved him.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Cerda.*

224 The central market in Palermo, still in existence today.

225 The double entendre here is that this description (*cornutu è*) also means the severed head belonged to a cuckold.

170. TWO CLOSE FRIENDS<sup>226</sup>

Once upon a time there were two close friends and neighbors, both of them wagon drivers. One of them had many children while the other had none. The man with many children had a wife who was a good woman, always busy with sewing and mending, while the man with no children had a capricious wife, who pretended to be a saint but was actually more like a devil.

Whenever the two men came home from work, the woman with no children would sidle up to her husband with all kinds of touches and caresses, whereas the other woman, poor thing, was kept so busy with all the children and housework she had that she couldn't pay her husband that kind of attention.

Well, one day the two friends fell to talking about their wives, and the one with no children said, "My wife is such an amorous creature! Whenever I come home sweaty from work, she touches me all over, and she even helps me unhitch the horse. But your wife, I notice, is less interested in you, since I never see her show that kind of affection."

"Do you know the reason why? It's because my wife is so busy with the children and all her other household tasks."

"What do you mean 'children' and 'tasks'? The plain fact is that she's indifferent to you."

And he needled him like this day after day, until finally he made his friend begin to dislike his wife. So one day, when this man came home from work and saw his neighbor's wife doing her usual fond caressing of her husband, he called out to his wife in irritation, "You there! Come and unhitch my horse, and lead him into the stable by his tail."

He gave these instructions because he had already decided to give her a beating. The poor woman, for her part, managed to unhitch the horse, but of course there was no way she could lead him into the stable by his tail. Then her husband, who was waiting for an excuse to punish her, picked up a whip and began beating her. The poor woman began to cry but said nothing. That evening, when they were going to bed, she asked her husband why he had given her such a beating, and he answered that she deserved it.

<sup>226</sup> Here and elsewhere we have translated Sicilian *cumpari* (Italian *compare*) as "friend," "close friend" or "good friend." It also can mean "godparent," since godparents were chosen from among one's closest friends or relatives. In this tale, each of the four spouses is considered the *cumpari* (male) or *cummari* (female) of the others.

"What have I done to deserve it?" she asked.

"It's what you haven't done!" he replied. "Look at how our neighbor treats her husband when he comes home from work! She dries his sweaty chest and takes the reins out of his hands—but you, you don't even notice me!"

"But I am always busy with the children, and those are things that I don't know how to do. My love for you is an honest one, but that of our friend next door is all pretence. 'You shouldn't betray St. John,' as they say, and I won't say another word on the subject."<sup>227</sup>

"What are you talking about?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing at all."

"Oh no, you'd better tell me, otherwise I'll have to give you the rest of that beating I began."

Now the poor woman had no choice but to reveal to him that all their neighbor's affections directed at her husband were an act, that she was actually having an affair with the parish priest, and her behavior towards her husband was meant to allay any suspicions he might have. "For my part," she concluded, "since I'm not being disloyal to you, what need should I have for all those external signs of affection?"

"With the parish priest?" asked the husband, dumbfounded. "You'd better be telling the truth, otherwise you're in trouble!"

"Oh, it's the truth all right."

"Well, then, you have to let me see this for myself. I'm going to pretend to be sick and stay hidden in the house, and you can let me see what you've seen."

And so, when his neighbor left for work, the man remained at home and kept watch, and before evening he saw a nice plump priest come to visit the woman next door. Then he could hear them carrying on for hours.

"I've seen all I need to see!" he said to himself.

Well, it soon came about that the two friends were out together on the road, and the one started up again with the familiar praise of his wife—how good she was, what an amorous woman she was, and so on. Finally, the other man couldn't keep quiet any longer and told him that all her affections were mere pretence.

"Pretence?" he asked. "My wife is pretending?"

Well, we know how words come like cherries, one connected to the next,

227 St. John was the patron saint of the *cumpari* relationship, hence of godparents and close friendships. See tale 110, which is based on this religious tradition.

and very soon his friend had told him that his wife was sleeping with the parish priest. The man refused to believe it, and so they made a bet.

"If what I'm saying about the priest is true," said the friend, "you have to give me twenty gold coins and your mare as well. If it isn't true, I'll give you my horse and the wagon with it."

"Agreed! But how will we discover the truth?"

"It's easy. We'll have a very large chest made, and you can lock yourself inside with a little chain. I'll bring the chest to your wife and tell her that you're working out of town and won't be back tonight. Then you'll be in a position to observe everything she does, and when the moment seems ripe, you can unlock the chain and come out."

"That's a perfect plan."

Once they had agreed on this, they had the chest made and locked the man inside. Then the friend took it to the wife and left it under a table in her house. When he had departed and evening approached, along came the parish priest and entered the house. Meanwhile, the friend had disguised himself as a poor beggar and returned to the house asking for alms. The wife, who was in high spirits cavorting with the priest, invited the beggar in to have some fun with him. "Here," she said, "have some bread, have some wine!" Then, pouring him a big glass of wine, she said, "I'm in the mood for toasts, so I'd like to offer one to you."

"All right," replied the neighbor disguised as a beggar, "you make a toast to me and then I'll make one back to you."

And so the woman lifted up her glass and said,

"While my husband's away in the countryside,  
He's earning outdoors but losing inside.  
With the parish priest and this excellent wine  
I'm giving myself a very good time."

"Oh, where did you learn such a lovely toast?" exclaimed the false beggar. "And now, my good lady, I'll let you hear mine."

Pay attention, handsome chest,  
Hear the words the lady's said.  
You already owe me twenty,  
But now I'm asking you for thirty,  
And your mare thrown in with the rest!"

You can imagine the reaction of the husband inside the chest! He flung open the lid, grabbed a cane, and first gave the priest such a thrashing

that he reduced him to a pulp.<sup>228</sup> Then he gave the same attentions to his wife.<sup>229</sup>

The other man went out, took off his disguise, and returned in his own clothes just as his friend was settling accounts with his wife.

"So then, this is what love is!" he exclaimed. "Now you can pay me the money and the mare you owe me, and I'll be on my way. Perhaps next time you'll be better at recognizing what a woman is about."

So the unhappy husband had to pay his friend what he owed him, and the friend went home to live in happy contentment with his wife and his children.  
*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 171. SETTILANZATI

Once there was a bourgeois gentleman with a wife he kept in town where she became enamored of a fine gentleman called Don Pietro. This man also had a son called Settilanzati, who lived with his father in the country and never visited the town.

One evening, however, the youth was seized with the impulse to go to town, and so he asked his father for permission.

"Father, I'd like to go into town."

"Why so?" asked the father. "We have plenty of bread right here."

"I'd like to visit mother," replied the youth.

"All right, then, you can go," said the father.

And so Settilanzati took the mule and departed. On his way he passed through a forest, where he gathered some wood for poles and loaded it all on his mule. Then he continued on to town, until he came to his mother's door and knocked.

"Who's there?"

"Settilanzati."

"Oh, my God!" cried the woman, who had her lover there with her, "it's Settilanzati! You must hide! Here, hide under the bed sheets."

Then she opened the door and invited her son inside. He unloaded the

228 The idiom is literally "whatever was hard in him he made soft," *e zoccu avia duru cci lu fici moddu*, which Pitrè glosses as "he broke his bones." But we must assume that the double entendre offers another, more sexual, level of meaning.

229 The original is much more poetic and onomapoetic, *e poi tiritinghi e tiritanghi cu la mughieri*, "and then tiritinghi and tiritanghi with his wife."

poles, carried them into the house, and then began piling them on the bed one by one, with a thump and a bang, a bang and a thump.<sup>230</sup>

“Hey, you scoundrel, what do you think you’re doing?” asked his mother.

“I’m just straightening them out properly.”

“But can’t you do that on the ground?”

“No, I have to do this to the bed, to soften it up. The other night father couldn’t get any sleep here because the straw was too hard.”

Then Settilanzati had a meal, mounted back up on his mule, and departed.

As soon as he was gone, his mother went to look at Don Pietro, who was in poor condition. She took him by the hand and slowly led him back to his own house, where he had to get in bed and stay for quite some time so that he couldn’t pay his usual visits to Settilanzati’s mother. Eventually he recovered and began taking walks again, and he stopped at the woman’s house.

“Has that vile young man been back again?” he asked her.

“Not at all. I haven’t seen him since you were last here.”

“Well, then, what if I come this evening?”

“That’s fine. Please do come if you like.”

Well, the fact was that nothing escaped Settilanzati, and he was well aware of what his mother was doing. So he said,

“Oh, father, I simply must go into town tonight.”

“My son, I can’t imagine what you need to do there, but if you really want to, then of course go.”

So Settilanzati took the mule, loaded it with saddlebags, and left. On the way he stopped to fill the saddlebags with stones, and he arrived just as they were setting the table for dinner.

“Oh, mother, it’s me!”

“Oh, my God!” she exclaimed, “It’s him again! What shall we do? Here, quickly, get under the bed!”

And this is what Don Pietro did, and when Settilanzati came in the front door carrying the stones, his mother asked, “What are you doing with all those stones?”

“I need them for rebuilding the sheepfold. Didn’t you notice how it’s all falling apart? I need to build a new one.”

And with that he began picking up the stones one by one and hurling them under the bed with all his strength. Some hit Don Pietro on the head, some on his legs, and the poor man was battered from head to foot. When that nice

230 We have used “bang and thump” to translate the onomatopoeic Sicilian *tùppiti e tàppiti, tùppiti e tàppiti*.

piece of work was completed, the young man got back on his mule and rode off. Don Pietro went back to his house more dead than alive, with his ribs badly bruised. He took to his bed and had to stay there for a long time, until he recovered from that battering. Eventually he felt well enough to go out again, and once more he stopped at the woman's door.

"Has that vile character come back?" he inquired.

"No, there's been no sign of him since your last visit," she replied.

"Well, then, may I visit this evening?"

"Of course," she replied.

Now Settlanzati again knew of the man's intended visit, and again he set out again as before, having loaded the mule's saddlebags with jugs of water.

"Why are you doing with those jugs?" asked his father.

"I'm taking them to mother. She's totally out of water."

Again he arrived just as they were setting the table, and he called out, "Oh, mother, it's me!"

"Oh, no, he's here again!" she exclaimed to her lover. "Here, quick, jump inside this barrel and hide!"

She had a large wine barrel without a lid, and that's where she had him hide.

When Settlanzati came in, he said to his mother, "Take that large tripod and set the cauldron on it." Then he poured all the water from the jugs into the cauldron, placed a bundle of wood underneath, and lit a fire.

"What do you plan to do with all that hot water?" his mother asked.

"Father has just checked all our vines, and the grapes are ripe and ready, but we have no place to put the new wine. I need to put this water into the barrel to make it swell up, so that we can fill it up to the top with wine."

"Oh, no, my son, leave it for your mother to do tomorrow. You shouldn't do it now when you're so tired."

"Oh, but you wouldn't know the right way to do it."

And as soon as he saw that the water was boiling vigorously, he took a large pot and began pouring the water into the barrel. It fell all over Don Pietro, scalding him. Once he had poured out all the water, Settlanzati mounted back on his mule and rode off.

As soon as he was gone, his mother ran to the barrel and pulled Don Pietro out. The man was a pitiful sight, all scorched and burned as he was, with even his toenails peeling off him.

"That does it!" he cried out as he went out the door. "I'm never coming here again, and I'm swearing on it with the sign of the cross." And he never did return there.

Months passed, and summer arrived. People were busy at their threshing-floors, and Settlanzati's mother said to Don Pietro, "If I knew where your

threshing-floor was, I'd come visit you there and bring you a little something to eat."

"If you want to know how to find it," he replied, "just face toward the mountain peak of Tutia and look for the kind of mule that pulls a small carriage. When you see where it is, that's where you can find me."

As soon as Setttilanzati learned that his mother was intending to visit Don Pietro, he took a large cloth and threw it over his mule, changing its appearance to look like one that pulls a small carriage. Then he set it in front of the view of the mountain peak.

"That's where Don Pietro's threshing-floor must be!" exclaimed Setttilanzati's mother, when she saw the mule, and so instead of going to Don Pietro's threshing-floor, she brought the food to her own husband's threshing-floor.

"Well, what in the world brings you here?" asked her husband.

"Oh," she replied, "I happened to find this nice little piece of meat, so I thought of bringing it to you. Being out in the country as you are, it must be a long time since you've had a meal this good."

And so they had a nice time eating the meat together. Now, the woman had also brought four pears with her, and so after they had finished the meat, she said to her son, "Which way is Don Pietro's threshing-floor? Would you be willing to take him two of these pears? Working out here in the country, I'm sure he doesn't find pears this good."

Then she placed two handsome pears inside Setttilanzati's shirt, and he went off toward Don Pietro's threshing area. But before he had gone very far, he dropped the pears by the roadside, leaving one on the left and one on the right. Then he continued to where Don Pietro was.

"Don Pietro," he called to him, "watch out! My father is on his way here. I don't know what he's heard, but he's certainly not coming to do you any good, so you'd better keep an eye out for him."

Then he went back to where his father was and told him, "Father, Don Pietro needs you to come as quickly as possible, because he has something urgent to tell you."

Since he heard it was urgent, the man left at once. Don Pietro, meanwhile, was on the lookout, and he saw Setttilanzati's father depart and start coming his way. "Oh my, he really is coming here!" he thought.

Meanwhile, as Setttilanzati's father drew near to Don Pietro's place, he saw a pear on the ground and picked it up. "Ah, what a beautiful pear!" he said, and put it inside his shirt. Then he saw the other pear and picked it up as well, so that he now had both pears tucked inside his shirt. Don Pietro, observing this maneuver from a distance, said to himself, "Oh, my, now

he's gathering rocks to use on me. This means serious trouble. What shall I do?"

And so, he saddled his horse and rode off to town.

"Where is Don Pietro?" Setttilanzati's father asked as he arrived.

"Oh," someone told him, "he's ridden back to town."

"What a way to treat people! Tell him that the next time we meet, I'll give him a piece of my mind."

Meanwhile, Setttilanzati and his mother had been watching from the distance. When Setttilanzati saw to his father returning, he said to his mother, "Oh, mother, you shouldn't stay here! Don Pietro has surely been saying terrible things about you to father, and when he gets here, it will go badly for you!"

The woman saw that her husband was angry and swearing as he came down the road—of course it was Don Pietro he was swearing at—and she thought, "It's true!" and took off immediately for town.

Now the father arrived and asked, "Where has your mother gone?"

"Oh," replied Setttilanzati, "mother really won the prize by making that trip out here!"

"What do you mean? What prize?"

"The prize for foolishness. Someone just came with the message that the houses in town are on fire."

When the father heard that the houses were on fire, he began running at full speed, cursing even more loudly. "You! Woman! I'll catch up with you and teach you a lesson! Wait for me!"

But far from waiting, his wife was running for all she was worth.

Along the roadside there was a series of threshing areas filled with people at work. First they saw Don Pietro speed by.

"What a rush Don Pietro is in! You can smell the sulfur from his horse!"

Then they saw the woman dash by, her wild hair streaming behind her, and trying to keep a little mantilla on her shoulders as she ran.

"Olé!" they shouted merrily at her. "Olé! There she goes! Run, pretty girl, run—your boy friend is way ahead of you!"

Then they saw her husband running and shouting, "Stop her! Catch her! Kill that harlot, kill her, I say!"

And these onlookers were fully enjoying the spectacle.

When the man and his wife arrived at their house, they found that nothing was burning.

"I thought the houses were all on fire," said the husband.

"Who ever told you that?" she replied.

"Setttilanzati said that someone brought the message that there was a fire."

"What fire? What message? What happened was that Settilanzati told me you were coming to give me a beating."

"A beating? I had no intention of giving you a beating."

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

"And now I wonder what he said to Don Pietro to make him take off like that?"

"Yes, he left so quickly I never got to talk to him at his threshing-place."

"Ah, so you never really spoke to him!"

"This is all Settilanzati's doing."

"What a scoundrel! What a conniver!"

Of course Settilanzati knew every detail of this and was so delighted that he couldn't stop laughing for days.

*Told by a peasant to Prof. Alfonso Accurso in Resuttano.*

## 172. MASTER BACÙ

Once upon a time there was a husband and wife. The husband was a master axe-man and was named Bacù, while the wife, named Cicca, was a young woman of exceptionally fine appearance, so fresh and fair that you could imagine drinking her like a glass of water.

This Master Bacù was jealous of his wife, and he kept close watch over her at all times, as if someone were about to snatch her away. In fact, the neighbors had never been allowed even to see her face.

Well, it happened eventually that two young men, who were terrible pranksters, had a discussion about Master Bacù's beautiful young wife, and it made them angry that no one so far had been able to catch a glimpse of her. The first one said, "I'll be darned if I'm going to be kept from having a look at that woman! I'll bet I can even manage to have a conversation with her!"

And so he left his companion and went and dressed up like a woman. He parted his hair down the middle, placed a handkerchief over his head, put on a long dress with a little bodice, an apron, and a shawl. And he finished by putting a nice plump pillow under the dress, over his stomach, so that he looked just like a very pregnant woman.

Then at dusk he went to Master Bacù's house.

"Knock, knock."

"Who's there?"

"Master Bacù, I'm a poor woman who's very pregnant. My husband was

arrested, and I've escaped to avoid being arrested as well!"

"And what do you want from me?"

"I beg you for one favor: give me a place to sleep for the night."

So Master Bacù let her in and entrusted her to his wife.

"Listen, Cicca," he said, "this poor creature has no place to sleep tonight, so why don't we help her out? You take her to sleep with you in your room, and I can sleep in the other room."

(You see, the house had only two rooms, a bedroom and a room for visitors.)

And so it was: the pregnant lady went in and shared the bed with Master Bacù's wife. Once they were together, the youth took off his woman's clothing and appeared as he really was.

"Master Bacù! Master Bacù! It's a boy!"<sup>231</sup> shouted the wife.

But Master Bacù thought that the pregnant woman had just given birth, and his wife was announcing that it was a boy. So he shouted back to her,

"That's just fine! Let it be!"

But when he heard his wife continuing to shout and raise a ruckus, he opened the door and went in, and there he found the young man. He picked up a big cudgel and started after him to give him a beating, but the youth was no sluggard, and with a leap he got out of the way and was out the door in a flash.

And so that's the story of Master Bacù!

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 173. THE MONK AND THE BROTHER

Once upon a time there was a monk who went around preaching from village to village, and he was accompanied by a young brother from the same order, who was as clever as could be. This monk had come to preach during Lent in one of the communes of Sicily, and he was preaching his heart out in the attempt to win new converts. But the people of this area were not very pious, and they would never dream of sending the preacher all the little delicacies that people normally send during Lent. When the preacher realized that this was the case, he began filling his sermons with

231 Here we had to use "boy" to suit the needs of English idiom. The Sicilian carries off the double entendre perfectly by using *masculu*, which means "male" and would be the normal word used at birth to announce "it's a boy."

pungent allusions to let the people know how far they were falling short. Finally, one of the bourgeois churchgoers took a large fish (it was a freshwater fish, because they didn't have ocean fish in that area), put it in a pouch, and sent it to the preacher.

"Ah," said the monk to the brother, "this is more like it! You have to care for the body just as much as you care for the spirit. What should we do with this fish, Brother Giovanni? Let's fry it."

"Whatever you wish, reverend," answered the brother.

And so they fried the fish and saved it. At noon neither of them mentioned it. Nor did they that evening, nor even the next day at noontime. When evening came, they still had not mentioned the fish. By now the brother realized that the monk selfishly wanted to eat the fish all by himself, and so he said to him, "Father, what are going to do with the fish? It'll soon begin to smell."

"Don't worry, we'll keep it for tomorrow since we're not hungry tonight."

"Not hungry? Why, my belly is aching for food!"

"Well, to tell the truth, I had a plan."

"What plan?"

"My plan would allow only one of us to eat the fish. Either I'd eat it all, or you'd eat it all."

"How so, father?"

"My idea was this: whoever has the best dream tonight, gets to eat the whole fish."

Now, although the monk was wily, this young brother was so clever that he could strip the shoes and socks off him while he was running. And so he understood what was going on, and replied, "That's a good plan. Whoever has the best dream tonight will get to eat the whole fish."

Once this agreement was made, they went to bed.

In the middle of the night the brother got up and went on tiptoe to the pantry to get the fish. He devoured it entirely, stuffing himself as if he were storing up food for a month. He finished it off with a bottle of wine, and then he went back to bed leaving no trace of the fish behind him.

The next morning, the monk—who had not been able to sleep a wink—got up with the first dawn light and went to wake up Brother Giovanni, who was still sleeping like a log. The young fellow was groggy at first and had to splash cold water over his face. When the monk saw that he was fully awake, he said to him, "Come now, Brother Giovanni, and tell us what you dreamt last night."

"Oh, father," he replied, "you tell me yours first, because I'm still trying to recall all of mine."

"Well," said the monk, "I dreamt that the good Lord was summoning me to the heavenly paradise. A band of angels descended with trumpets and songs and played a sacred symphony that was a joy to my ears. Then the archangels and seraphim came down, together with all the saints, and they sang songs that were the most beautiful thing you could imagine. When I heard them call my name, I woke up. The angels took me by the hand and lifted me from my bed, and I felt I would die from happiness. The angels gently carried me up into the sky, and I was flying around as if I had wings, but it was the angels who were carrying me. And at this moment I awoke and found myself in my own bed. So this, my dear Brother Giovanni, is the dream I had. Now you tell me yours."

"Well, father, my dream was that, when I saw your Reverence ascending to heaven with the angels and archangels, the seraphim and all the saints, I began weeping inconsolably. I called to you again and again, but your Reverence didn't hear me. I called out 'Oh, father, reverend father, please pray for me, for I am left behind in this world of woe. Father, oh, father!' But my reverend, you didn't even turn around to look. So, then, what was I supposed to do? I went and opened the drawer and ate the fish. I figured that since you weren't here any more, the bet was off."

As soon as the monk heard, this he realized what the brother had done. He ran to the pantry, opened it, and found the fish was gone.

"Ah, Brother Rascal, so you beat me to it! Here I thought that I was being the clever one, but you totally outfoxed me. It's a costly lesson I've learned today."

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 174. THE PRIEST AND HIS SHEPHERD FRIENDS

**T**here's a story they've often told about a priest who had a maid named Serafina and about three shepherds, who were brothers and good friends with the priest. The oldest was called Giseppi, the next Vicienzu, and the youngest Ciccu.

Well, one Sunday Giseppi went to attend mass, and he stopped off at his friend the priest's house, where he brought his mule loaded with ricotta, fresh goat cheese, two young kids, and other items. The priest gave him a warm welcome when he saw the loaded mule, and at that moment the church bell began ringing.

"The bell is ringing," said the priest. "It's time for mass."

So Giseppi put his mule inside and went off to church.

As the maid Serafina was unloading the mule, the priest said to her, "Buy food for three people at dinner—pasta, stew, and a roast. And now listen carefully to what I say. When we are about to begin dinner, I'm going to say to you,

‘Praise Jesus and thank him for this dinner;  
Whoever eats very much is a sinner!’

Then you must eat next to nothing and I'll do the same, and when he sees us doing that he'll also have to refrain from eating."

When the clock struck twelve, Giseppi returned from mass, the table was set, and they all sat down for dinner. As they were lifting their first forkfuls of pasta, the priest said,

“Praise Jesus and thank him for this dinner;  
Whoever eats very much is a sinner!”

Then the two of them hardly ate a bite, and Giseppi realized that he had to do the same. When the stew was served, the same little recitation took place, and the stew remained uneaten. The same thing also happened with the roast, so that by the end of the meal poor Giseppi was dying of hunger. He took leave of the priest, kissed his hand with due reverence, and went off to the market, where he found his brothers and told them what had happened.

“Next Sunday I'll go,” said Vicienzu, “and you'll see if I come back dying of hunger.”

So, when the holiday came, he loaded the mule in the same way, and after the priest gave him the same greeting, Vicienzu went to mass. Afterwards, Serafina set the table, and they all sat down to eat. At the first mouthful the priest said,

“Praise Jesus and thank him for this dinner;  
Whoever eats very much is a sinner!”

and he ate next to nothing. Therefore Vicienzu had to do the same, and by the end of the meal he was dying of hunger. When he left to join his brothers at the market, the maid and the priest ate all the remaining food.

“Well, how did you make out?” his brothers asked when they saw him.

“I came away dying of hunger,” he replied.

“Next Sunday it's my turn to go,” said Ciccu, the youngest. “And you'll see if I don't manage to eat him out of house and home.”

So he, too, loaded the mule with ricotta, goat cheese, and kids, and left for the priest's house. After he was received in the same manner, he went off to

mass. After mass, Serafina prepared dinner for three, set the table, and at the first mouthful the priest recited,

“Praise Jesus and thank him for this dinner;  
Whoever eats very much is a sinner!”

But Ciccu replied,

“This is good advice for you, dear priest,  
But this belly of mine has come here to feast!”

And with these words he took the priest’s portion and the maid’s and devoured them both along with his own. When the stew was served, right before the first mouthful, the priest said,

“Praise Jesus and thank him for this dinner;  
Whoever eats any more is a sinner!”

And again Ciccu replied,

“This is good advice for you, dear priest,  
But this belly of mine has come here to feast!”

And again he devoured all three portions. When the roast was served, there were the same recitations, and again Ciccu managed to eat everything and to drink his fill.

“Father,” he said when he was done, “I don’t think I’ll go back home tonight. Instead, I’ll wait until tomorrow morning.”

Now the priest was truly upset, because he and his maid still had empty stomachs. When they made up the bed for Ciccu that evening, he said, “I’m not accustomed to sleeping in a bed, so I’ll just sleep here on top of this large chest.”

They spent the remainder of the evening conversing, and at nighttime they all went to bed. Ciccu got up very early, before dawn, and opened the chest, which was filled with all the provisions he and his brothers had brought. He put them into two large saddlebags, loaded them on his mule, and rode off.

In the morning, when the priest and the maid saw that Ciccu and his mule were gone, they opened the chest and found it was empty. The priest began shouting at the maid, but she answered him saying, “It’s you who are to blame for trying to starve those brothers.”

Meanwhile, as Ciccu was approaching the market, his brothers could see from far off that his mule was heavily loaded, and they called out to him, “How did you make out?”

Then he told them the whole story, of how he had managed to eat everything himself and had left the priest and his maid with empty stomachs. "And I loaded up all the things we brought to the priest, and I brought them back with me here."

Then his brothers shouted, "Long live Ciccu!" And so ends my story.  
*Told by M. Giuseppe La Duca to G. Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

## 175. THE BOURGEOIS GENTLEMAN AND THE PREACHER

**T**here is a custom here that, when a visiting preacher makes the rounds during Lent, the bourgeois population is supposed to invite him to their homes, and they spend a small fortune on this entertainment as they compete over who can do it best.

In one of these towns—let's say it was in the vicinity of Caccamo—there was a bourgeois gentleman who was very fond of priests. And so every year, when the preacher came around, he would always invite him to his house for a lavish feast. Indeed, he would turn his house upside down in the effort to please the preacher, and he would have many chickens and pigeons killed to furnish his table.

Now, the gentleman's wife was not at all pleased by this behavior because her husband was the stingiest miser imaginable regarding her own needs, but when it came to the clergy he spent money like water. Well, the Lenten season came around, and when the preacher arrived, this gentleman invited him for the following Sunday.

"My dear wife," he exclaimed as soon as he entered his house, "next Sunday the preacher is coming here to dine with us, so prepare to kill three birds and make them into a nice stew. There should also be a broth, and you can take care of the other details as well."

Hearing this, the woman grew sulky. When Sunday came, she killed the pigeons and cooked them, but since she was a bit of a glutton, she kept nibbling away at the three pigeons, one after the other, until there was almost nothing left.

Finally, it was Sunday and the preacher arrived.

"I kiss your hand, reverend father," said the woman.

"May God's blessing be with you, good daughter," he replied.

"You honor us with your presence today."

"It is I who am honored," he replied.

"And what a beautiful pair of eyes!" she continued, looking directly into his face and examining his eyes carefully. "I will certainly shed tears when they are gone."

"What did you just say, my good woman?"

"Nothing, father . . . It's just that my husband . . ."

"What about your husband? Speak!" demanded the priest.

"Well, you should know that my husband has two great weaknesses. He is crazy about eyes, and he just can't keep from gouging one out and eating it whenever he gets the chance. Here in town, everyone knows about it, and they protect themselves, but people from out of town are always taken in by him. Whenever a new preacher arrives, he uses the pretext of inviting him to dinner and then gouges out his eyes."

As soon as the priest heard this, he took to his heels and was off like a shot. At this moment, who should be returning but the husband? He was astonished to see the preacher fleeing, and he asked his wife, "Why is he running off like that?"

"Why is he running off? Because he saw we had three pigeons in the pot, and he ran off with all of them!"

"All of them?" asked the husband.

"Yes, all of them," she replied. "You bring me such uncouth guests, who don't have even a smidgeon of good manners!"

When he heard this, the husband ran outside like a man possessed, and began chasing the priest and shouting,


"You're keeping all of them? You won't even let me have one?" (referring of course to the pigeons). "At least one, good father! At least give me one!"

As he heard these shouts, the priest naturally assumed the man was asking for one of his eyes. "Good God!" he exclaimed. "This man really does want my eyes! No, I won't give two or even one of them. I need them both!" And he ran all the faster in his fear that the gentleman wanted to poke out his eyes.

Finally, when the bourgeois gentleman realized he had no chance of catching up to the priest, he returned home like a beaten dog. From that day on he abandoned his habit of inviting the visiting preacher to dinner, and that's how his wife freed herself of this dreadful annoyance.

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 176. THE TAILOR

nce upon a time there was a tailor who had a wife called Gnura Grazia.<sup>232</sup> The tailor's name was Don Giuseppe, and he earned his living by visiting people's homes to cut clothing for them.

One day he received a summons from the king to come and do some work at the palace. Now it happened that Don Giuseppe's house was next to the royal palace, and there was a common wall with a small passageway that led directly into the king's chambers. So, when Don Giuseppe's wife found that her husband was spending a lot of time at the palace, she poked her head through the opening in the wall in order to see what he was doing. Then she went back into her house and began calling loudly for her husband, saying that she needed him at once. Don Giuseppe had to beg the king's permission to go back home and see what his wife wanted, and the king granted it.

As soon as Don Giuseppe was home, he began calling his wife, and she answered, "Here I am. Come on upstairs."

When he went upstairs, she asked him how he liked the king's house, but he was so annoyed to learn that his wife had called him without any real purpose that he went back to the palace to resume work. His wife, meanwhile, used the passageway to enter the palace, and she began an amorous relationship with the king.

During this time, Don Giuseppe continued to work on cutting clothes, and when he was done, he returned home and called to his wife, "Gnura Grazia, I'm back." As soon as she heard him, she quickly slipped back through the passageway and called to him from her room, "Oh, Gnuri, don't interrupt me now. Can't you see I'm at the spinning wheel?"

So Don Giuseppe felt reassured and went back to work at the palace. The instant he was gone, his wife went right back to the king and resumed her relationship with him. Well, by now the king was hopelessly in love with Gnura Grazia, and they decided that they would get married, and she should have a proper wedding dress. So they bought material for a fine gown, but of course they needed a tailor, and since Don Giuseppe was the finest tailor in the land, he was the one they summoned.

When he appeared at the palace, his wife was already there. The king didn't bat an eyelash when he ordered Don Giuseppe to take the measurements of

232 Characters' names in these tales are often prefixed with Gnura and Gnuri, shortened forms of Signura and Signuri, the Sicilian words for "Mr." and "Mrs."

the young woman he saw before him. The tailor looked at her closely, and his heart sank. His hands trembled as he reached forward, and his face grew pale as he realized that this looked very much like his own wife. He thought quickly about what to do and decided to pretend he had forgotten to bring his tailor's chalk. So he rummaged in his purse, and then said,

"There is one favor I must ask of your Majesty."

"And what is that?" replied the king.

"I forgot to bring my chalk, and I need to go home to get it."

"You may go," said the king, "but be sure to return immediately."

"I'll be right back!" said Don Giuseppe, and off he went.

The minute he was back home, he began calling for his wife, because he had some very disturbing thoughts in his head. His wife, who was still in the palace, could hear him calling, so she rushed back home to answer him. "What's the matter? Are you back so soon, you blockhead? You're always finding some excuse to come home! Get back to work and earn a living for us! And don't you dare show up here again, or you'll be looking for trouble!"

And so Don Giuseppe was reassured and returned to the palace. When the king saw him, he said,

"Well, Don Giuseppe, will you be asking for any further favors, or are you satisfied now?"

"No further favors, thank you," replied the tailor, and he went back to work on the wedding dress. Gnura Grazia, in the meantime, had returned to the palace, and he had to look at her as he worked. He grew pale again and was even more troubled than before. So again he thought of an excuse:

"Your Majesty, I need another favor."

"What is it?"

"I forgot my scissors and have to go home to get them."

"I will grant you this one extra favor," replied the king. "But beware: if you should leave for anything more after this, you will forfeit your head."

So Don Giuseppe went back to his house, and his wife very quickly took off the gown and put on her housecoat, and when he arrived, he found her at the spinning wheel. He was relieved to see her there, but she was extremely upset and bawled him out, complaining that his excessive jealousy was going to cost them their livelihood forever. All he could do was to remark that she bore a striking resemblance to the king's fiancée, and then he left.

Once back at the palace, he resumed work on the wedding dress. As he began cutting, he again looked at the woman and once again was profoundly upset. This time he said to the king,

"Your Majesty, I've developed an awful queasy feeling in my stomach, and I

have to do something about it. I beg permission to leave and to relieve myself outside.”

The king understood full well what was going on, and was very reluctant to let the man go, but he had little choice but to grant his wish.

The tailor rushed home, and again Gnura Grazia was there ahead of him.

“Oh, what a plague you are!” she exclaimed. “This time you’ve surely cost us our livelihood!”

“But how can I help it?” he replied. “Every time I go to take her measurements, I’m convinced that it’s you standing there in front of me!”

“But you yourself keep the front door key, and you keep me here under lock and key. So how can you think that I can be both here and there at the same time? Go back to your work and don’t worry about anything. Who knows? If you make a good impression on the king, they may invite me to the wedding, and afterwards, when the newlyweds go on their honeymoon, perhaps they’ll take me along with them. It won’t be a problem for you to remain here alone for a few days in charge of the house. And when I return, I’d be bringing all kinds of gifts from the royal couple.”

So Don Giuseppe let himself be persuaded, and he returned to the palace and completed his work on the wedding dress. Then the wedding date was chosen, and a public announcement was made.

When the wedding day arrived, the king said to Don Giuseppe that they would be leaving immediately for their honeymoon in the country, and taking the tailor with them. The wedding took place that evening, and Don Giuseppe went home to inform his wife of these plans.

“The king has invited me to accompany him on his honeymoon,” he said. “So I’m leaving you alone for a few days. When I depart, I want to see you looking out the window. As long as I am with the king, I want you to keep looking out the window, and afterwards you can go back inside. Be sure to keep yourself veiled while you’re at the window so that no one else sees you.”

Before he departed, she assured him that all would be well, and there was no cause to worry. As soon as the tailor went to the palace, his wife got a round gourd, wrapped a little shawl around it, and set it in the window.

Now the king and his bride and the tailor set out from the palace, leading the wedding party, and the tailor was careful to look at the window of his house to make sure his wife was there. Once he had seen her, he signaled her to go back inside, but of course she didn’t move, since this was not his wife but a gourd. The tailor was irritated and said to himself, “That stupid woman just won’t go back inside!” As he rode further along, he couldn’t stop thinking about her, until finally, not saying a word to the king, he turned his horse around and rode straight back to his house to see if his wife was still at the

window. From a distance he kept signaling her to go back inside, and still she didn't move. Now he was really angry and hurried as fast as he could to get there and give her a beating for her obstinacy. But imagine his amazement upon his arrival when he found a round gourd wrapped in a shawl! He stood there like a fool, and then began to shout, "I've been betrayed! I've been tricked! Now I see what the king was doing! Now I see what my wife was up to!"

And the poor man continued shouting like this, until he finally went crazy. *Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 177. THE TWO SWINDLERS

**T**hey've told this tale in Casteltermini about two masterful swindlers called Vicienzu and Filippu. Well, one day, when they both were starving to death and at their wits' end, Filippu said to Vicienzu, "Old friend, what are we going to do about this desperate condition we're in?"

"Leave it to me," replied Vicienzu. "My idea is that we take the painting that's hanging in your house and see what a pawn-broker will give us for it."

So they took the painting to the shop of a certain Gnuri Filici, and he gave them three carlini,<sup>233</sup> since it was just an old painting. They left his shop with the agreement that they could have the picture back when they returned the three carlini.

Now Vicienzu put his plan into action. He went to the house of a gentleman and borrowed a suit of excellent quality, a handsome hat, and five gold crowns, and in this disguise he went back to Gnuri Filici's shop.

"I hear that you have a painting for sale," said Vicienzu.

"Oh, that's not for sale," replied Gnuri Filici. "It's quite old and very valuable."

"It doesn't matter how valuable it is. I'm ready to pay you double the price."

Well, they discussed the price and arrived at the sum of eighteen gold crowns. Vicienzu gave him five crowns as deposit, saying, "I'll be back tomorrow with the rest of the money, and then I'll take the painting."

233 A carlino was a coin of little value, named after the Bourbon monarch Charles (Carlo), King of the Two Sicilies.

Afterward, he went back to his friend Filippu and revealed to him what he had arranged. Then Vicienzu changed back into his customary clothes and returned to Gnuri Filici's shop.

"Gnuri Filici," he said, "here I am back with the three carlini. So now let me have back my painting."

But Filici, because he had made his deal with the false gentleman, had no intention of giving back the painting.

"The painting is ruined," he said. "It fell off the wall and broke."

"But that's a valuable painting," responded Vicienzu, "and I'm not going to leave here without it."

"Well, what if I give you six gold crowns for it?" said Filici.


"Only six crowns? No, that's a very valuable painting, and I really want it back."

Well, after considerable discussion, they finally agreed that Filici could keep the painting for the price of twelve crowns. And so Vicienzu went back to his friend Filippu, delighted to have twelve gold crowns in his pocket.

Let's leave the two of them there and return to Gnuri Filici, who was still awaiting the return of the gentleman who was going to pay him eighteen gold crowns. He began looking up and down all the streets, eager to see the fine gentleman return to give him the money and take the picture. He waited and waited, but the man never came. Finally, in frustration and rage, he smashed the picture to bits. Thus did Gnuri Filici lose his money, while "gentleman" Vicienzu and his accomplice Filippu made out very well.

*Told by Giuseppe La Duca to Gaetano di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

## 178. THE POOR SHOEMAKER

nce upon a time there was a very poor shoemaker who had no possessions in this world. It was as if the sky had dumped him on earth and the earth reluctantly accepted him. When he was lucky enough to have a customer, he would take the money to buy whatever materials he needed for the job, and he used whatever tiny sum was left over to feed himself. In this way, he managed to live from day to day at a simple level.

Now, since this shoemaker was a young man, it occurred to him that he should marry. When he found a young woman whose hand he could ask for, she said yes, because she was even poorer than he was. In a few days the marriage was concluded, and he brought his new wife to live with him in

the little hovel he called a home. He worked whenever luck brought him a customer, and with his humble earnings he endeavored to support himself and his wife.

One day, the shoemaker happened to hear that they were selling fresh sardines in the town square, and he was overcome by a powerful desire to have some. It had been so long since he had tasted them! He touched his wallet to see if he had enough money in it and found that he had just enough small change. So, without letting his wife know about it, he went off and bought the sardines. When he returned home, he was imagining that his wife would be delighted and eager to prepare a little feast. But it was quite the contrary. As soon as she saw the sardines, she told him he was a complete fool because they had neither wood to make a fire nor a pan to fry them in.

In response the shoemaker argued that there was really no problem. He remembered that he had a pair of old shoe lasts, and he was able to break them up and turn them into wood for cooking. With that problem solved, all that was needed was a frying pan, and he told his wife to get dressed and go borrow one from the next-door neighbor. So she went to the neighbor, came back with a frying pan, fried the sardines, and they had them for dinner.

After dinner, the man asked his wife to return the frying pan to the neighbor who had lent it, or else they would have trouble borrowing things in the future. The wife refused, pointing out that the husband was as well equipped as she was with a pair of feet and could easily take it back himself. Well, with the man saying the woman should take it back, and the woman saying the man should do it, they battled to a standstill, and no one took it back. By now the husband was tired of arguing, and he proposed that they resolve the issue by making a bet.

“Whoever speaks the first word, has to take back the frying-pan,” he said.

His wife agreed to this, and the contest was on. They both went downstairs into the shop and began to do their work. The shoemaker did nothing but whistle while he worked, and his wife could be heard singing as she sat at the spinning wheel. They worked that way well into the evening, and then they both went upstairs to go to bed. Neither of them bothered to shut the front door, and so it remained unbolted.

Around midnight, some people who were passing by noticed that the door was open, and they wondered why. Overcome by curiosity, they entered, went upstairs, and came upon the husband and wife, both lying in bed with eyes wide open and not responding at all to the visitors. The visitors gave each of them a shake, but they just looked back at them without speaking. Since one of the visitors knew something about first aid, he checked the pulse of both husband and wife, and he found that their pulses were normal. But he still

suspected that something was seriously wrong and the couple might die at any moment, so he convinced his companions to call a priest who could administer the last rites. A few of them hurried to the local priest and told him he was needed to administer extreme unction (the sacrament given to those who are dying), and so he came at once.

The priest began with the husband, and while he was anointing him with the holy unguent, the man just looked at him without uttering a word. Then he turned to the wife and began applying the unguent to her as well. At first she did the same as her husband, looking at the priest and not saying a single word. But finally, when it came to putting the unguent on her shoulders, the woman gave a shout, protesting against having her nightgown removed. The instant her husband heard her speak, he jumped out of bed and ordered her to take the frying pan back to their neighbor, since she had spoken the first word!

When the priest heard this, he looked at the company of people who had summoned him and asked if this was some kind of joke. By this time, all who had gathered there fully understood what had been going on, and they piously crossed themselves, realizing that they had caused a great scare over nothing.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 179. THE TWO BLIND MEN

**H**ere's a story told time and again about a blind man who was once dying of hunger and was as weak and frail as could be. He sought out another blind man and said to him, "My good friend, whatever are we going to do to keep from starving to death?"

"Why don't we go to Palermo," replied his friend.

"I don't think I have the strength," said the first blind man.

"Just lean on my arm, dear fellow," he said, "and I'll lean on yours, and that way we can both get there."

So they made their way to Palermo, frail as they were, and when they arrived, they were wondering how to get some small morsel to eat. They calculated how much that would cost and arrived at the sum of six copper coins.

"Six coppers is what we need," one of them said.

A man was passing by who overheard what they were saying, and he said, "Here, I'll give you six coins."

He actually didn't hand them anything, but each blind man held forth his hand, and each one concluded that the other had received the money. And so they proceeded into town, thinking they had six coins. After they found their way to a trattoria, they ordered something to eat. When they were finished eating, the waiter asked to be paid. The first blind man said to the second,

"All right, pay the man."

"You're the one with the money," replied the second blind man.

And so they began to argue among themselves. Now the owner of the restaurant got involved and demanded to be paid. At this moment who should be walking by but the very man who had pretended to give them the money.

"You shouldn't be pestering those two blind men," he said. "I'll see to it that you get your money, if you'll just have one of your waiters follow me." So the owner sent a young waiter with him, and the man led him to the town church. He found the priest who was hearing confessions and took him aside and whispered in his ear, "This young man is not well in his head and suffers from the delusion that he is owed some money. You need to rid him of this delusion by giving him confession."

"Leave it to me," replied the priest. "I think I can straighten him out."

So when the priest had finished hearing the confessions of all the women who were there, he called the waiter and said,

"Come now, it's your turn for confession."

"Confession? What confession?" answered the waiter. "I came here for the money that's owed me!"

"No, it's all right, I understand that you're having a problem. Just come and allow me to confess you."

"Problem? No, just give me my money, and I can go!"

"Is that so? Just wait a minute, then," said the priest, and he went and got a stick to beat him with, so that the delusion would leave him.

But the waiter kept shouting, "I want my money!" while the priest kept yelling back, "Your mind is possessed! I must rid you of your demon!"

Eventually a crowd gathered around them, and the people separated the waiter and the priest to hear what each one had to say.

"You tell your story," said the priest.

"No, you can speak first," replied the waiter.

Well, it soon became clear that they had been tricked, and both of them had been taken for a ride.

And so ends the tale: the blind men were delighted to get a free meal, and the stranger was able to pull the wool over many people's eyes.

*Told by Francesca Leto to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 180. THE DOCTOR'S APPRENTICE

Once upon a time there was a doctor who took his apprentice with him whenever he visited his patients. One day, while he was attending to a sick man, he said, "Ah! Why don't you listen to me when I tell you not to eat anything?"

"Doctor, I assure you that I haven't eaten anything," the sick man said.

"That's not true," the doctor responded. "I've found your pulse beating so fast that it seems to me you've been eating grapes."

Realizing that he had been caught, the patient said, "All right, what do you want? It's true, I've eaten some grapes but only a little bunch."

"Very well, but don't risk eating any more because you can't fool me."

The poor apprentice, who was with the doctor, was astonished to see how his master had managed to tell from the pulse that the man had eaten grapes. So, immediately after leaving the house, he asked, "Master how did you know that he had eaten grapes?"

"Listen," the doctor replied, "whoever goes to visit sick people must never come across as a fool. As soon as you enter, you must cast your eyes all over, on the bed and under it as well. You can tell right away from the crumbs what a person has eaten. In this case I saw the stalks of the grapes and knew what he had eaten."

The next day it so happened that there were so many sick people in the town that the doctor couldn't attend to them all. So he sent his apprentice to visit a few. Among others, the apprentice went to see the sick man who had eaten the grapes, and he wanted to appear to be an expert just like his master so that he would be highly regarded as a capable doctor. When he noticed that there were bits of straw beneath the bed, he became angry.

"Well, you just won't listen, will you? I know that you've eaten something."

"I assure you," the sick man said, "that I haven't even had a drop of water."

"That's not true," the apprentice said. "I see that you've been eating straw because there are bits beneath the bed."

"Do you think that I'm an ass just like you?" the sick man responded.

And so the apprentice proved himself to be the fool that he was.

*Collected in Salaparuta by Giuseppe Pitre.*

## 181. THE BET

There was once a husband and wife. The husband was a shoemaker and the wife did spinning for people. One time, when the husband learned that fresh sardines were being sold at the village square, he said to his wife, "I'm going to buy some sardines, but what can we cook them in?"

"We each have to do some errands," the wife said. "I'll go and borrow a pan from our neighbor, and you go and buy the charcoal. I'll go and buy the oil, and you can make the fire. Then I can fry the sardines."

After the husband brought her the sardines, the wife fried them and put them in a plate on the table. Then she said to her husband, "Now that the sardines are fried, let's sit down and eat them."

"Before we do this," the husband said, "let's make a bet. I have to finish making shoes that I had just begun, and you have to finish the wool you were spinning on the distaff. Nobody can talk. Whoever finishes first gets to eat the sardines."

The wife sang, and the husband whistled without hearing a thing. Meanwhile, a neighbor came to the door and began to cry out, "Friends, friends!" But there was no response. After much shouting and calling, when he couldn't endure it any longer (and also because he had called some neighbors), the friend became annoyed and knocked down the door. All at once he saw the husband and wife singing and whistling, and they didn't say a thing!

"You two heard me calling you the entire evening, and you didn't want to respond at all!"

Indeed, the two of them heard him, but they were not allowed to talk as part of the bet, so they couldn't respond to him. Well, since they wouldn't talk to their friend, he sat down and ate the entire plate of sardines. Then, without saying a thing, the friend got up and left. All the people who heard this story clapped their hands for the friend and could only give the husband and wife thousands of reproaches!

My tale's been told and written down

Now it's your turn to tell your own.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

182. THE HYPOCRITICAL PEASANT<sup>234</sup>

Once there was a peasant who was very much devoted to Christ on the Crucifix. As the hardships of his home grew and piled up, the peasant tried to endure them as patiently as he could. However, he was curious to know how he was going to die. Since he always went to church, he decided to go there and kneel down before the altar of the Crucifix. Among his prayers he asked Christ a favor and to tell him how he was going to die. The next day he went again and spoke in a loud voice to the Lord. Upon hearing this loud voice, the sacristan became curious to know why the peasant was coming to the altar of the Crucifix every day. So he hid himself and heard the entire story.

"All right," the sacristan said to himself. "I'll help him out and see if I can have some fun with him tomorrow."

Since it was daytime, the peasant left, and the sacristan came out of his hiding place and closed the church. The next day the sacristan didn't move from the church, and because he knew when the peasant would enter, he went and hid himself behind the altar of the Crucifix to play a good joke. Soon the peasant appeared and went to kneel down before the altar to say his prayers. Among other things, he asked the Lord to send providence to him and his children, and he concluded his prayers by saying that he was not going to leave the church until the Lord told him how he was going to die. As soon as the sacristan heard this, his ears perked up, for he had already thought of an answer. In short, the sacristan, who was well hidden, made it seem that it was the Crucifix that was speaking in a loud voice, and he said, "You want to know how you're going to die? You're going to be hanged!"

Well, the peasant listened closely to the Lord, and all at once he responded, "And you, because of your bad language, you should be crucified!"

And this is what Christ's devoted followers are like!

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

<sup>234</sup> *Viddanu*, *villano* in Italian, carries with the implication of rustic and boor.

## 183. THE MASTER SHOEMAKER AND THE GHOSTS

Once there was a shoemaker dying of hunger and full of courage. Since he hadn't been able to earn a cent, he slapped his toolbox on his back one day and went in search of some work. However, it was a waste of time, for when it became dark in the evening, he found himself in a village where the people were starving even more than he was. Well, in this village there was a large palace, and when the shoemaker saw it, he became curious to know who was living there, and he asked some people nearby. They told him that the palace was vacant because it was filled with ghosts, and whoever dared to enter always came out more dead than alive. The shoemaker, despite himself, decided to go and remain there, and this is what he did.

That evening, while he was working in the palace, a monk appeared all of a sudden, and this man had such a long beard that it touched his feet. When he put out the candle, the shoemaker was very patient. He took the candle and lit it again after the monk had put it out. Some time passed, and the same thing happened. Meanwhile, the shoemaker patiently lit the candle again. The third time he refused to continue like this. Instead, he grabbed his paring knife and approached the monk like a mad dog, ready to stab him. But the man with the long beard disappeared, and the master shoemaker was so dumbstruck with amazement so that it was difficult to keep up his courage. So now he took a hammer and began to beat on his shoemaker's last to make the remaining ghosts come out and by making so much noise he hoped he'd have a little company. Well, no sooner did he begin this hammering than he saw two lines of monks carrying a dead person on top of a bier. As he watched them, they made their round. Then they left the dead person there and departed.

Just imagine how the poor shoemaker felt all alone with the corpse! He stood there like a poor devil unable to utter a word! He wanted to summon his courage, but his fear was growing. After standing like this for a while, he noticed a monk who was eating, and he asked for a bite to eat. However, the monk responded that he would only give him something if the shoemaker did as he told him. Well, since the shoemaker was starving, he would have done anything for food and agreed. The monk gave him something to eat, and afterwards he told the shoemaker that he had to pretend he was dead without making a sound or a peep. Otherwise, he would really die. Then he disappeared. After some time passed, a few monks appeared. They placed him in a coffin and carried him into a church and locked him in a tomb.

The next morning the shoemaker opened the lid, and what do you think he saw? Well, he saw that the tomb was filled with gold, silver, and copper coins. Slowly he got out of the coffin to fetch his toolbox. As he crossed the room, he saw that the coffin was made of silver. Quickly he stuffed the coins into his sack, pockets, and shoes, and returned home to his wife.

Once there, he had a palace and garden built and purchased carriages. Indeed, he became a fine gentleman.

They were happy and lived in peace

While we still sit here and pick our teeth.

*Told by Anna Guastella, a maid, in Palermo.*

## 184. THE DESPERATE SHOEMAKER

Once upon a time there was a poor shoemaker, who lost all his money and became so poverty-stricken that there was nothing left on his bones. One day, not having anything to do, and dying of hunger, he went into the countryside. He walked and walked, and when it turned dark, he saw a light and said to himself, "I'd better go there."

So he continued walking until he reached the place where the light had been burning. No sooner did he arrive than he saw a grand palace with a bell tower and clock. When he began knocking at the door, nobody responded. The poor shoemaker was desperate not only because he was starving but also because nobody was responding. Finally, he heard a voice.

"Who's there?"

"It's me."

"And who are you?"

"Can you spare a little bread for me?"

As he was saying this, he saw the door open. So the poor man entered but didn't see anyone. All of a sudden the door closed.

"Oh! For the love of Mary, give me some bread!"

Nobody responded. He summoned his courage and climbed the stairs where he saw many grand rooms, all of them ornamented and illuminated by candles that went out by themselves. The poor shoemaker was so distressed by everything and tired from his suffering that, when he saw a bed, he went to sleep. While he was sleeping, seven ladies appeared, carrying torches in their hands. One of them called him: "Brother Ghiniparu." One said to him: "Little Shoemaker!" Another said: "Head of a dog!" Another: "May you be

cursed!" Another said to him: "What are you doing here?" The last one said: "One handsome fellow!"

As she said this, the shoemaker began to wake and began to look about him. He summoned his courage and said, "You see that I'm a poor shoemaker. Do me a favor and show me how I can get out of here,"

One of the ladies responded, "Are you married?"

"Yes."

"How many children do you have?"

"I have seven."

"Well then, what do you want to bring to your children?"

"I want to bring them bread so that they can eat."

"And do you think that we here have bread?! You may leave, and you'll see a rose down below. Make sure that you don't pick it."

As soon as the shoemaker heard these words, he descended the stairs and saw that the door was open. When he noticed the rose, he said, "I've got to pick that rose. It's my fortune."

He picked the rose, and as soon as he did this, someone grabbed him.

"You're a dead man! If you want to remain alive, you have to take this rose and bring it to the seven ladies who sent you here. And you had better listen to what I have to say to you: when you are upstairs, you won't find the right door anymore. You are to smell this rose, and wherever it leads you, you are to enter."

The poor shoemaker climbed the stairs and didn't know where to go. He smelled the rose, and a door opened. He saw the seven ladies on their knees, and they said to him, "Give us that rose, and we'll give you whatever you want."

The shoemaker responded, "You must give me sixty thousand gold coins and this palace, and then you all must leave. One other thing: I want you to bring my family here. If not, I shall keep this rose, and all of you will die."

You should have seen all this!

Well, an enormous door opened, and at the end of it was a telescope.

The seven ladies said to him, "Look through the telescope and see what's there."

The shoemaker looked through the telescope, and he saw his wife weeping and his children around her, asking for bread. The shoemaker said to the seven ladies: "If you have my family brought here, I'll give you the rose."

The eldest of the ladies threw her torch on to the ground, and all of a sudden the shoemaker's wife and children appeared. As soon as they saw each other, they kissed and hugged one another. The shoemaker gave the rose to the ladies, and that evening there was a grand entertainment. After they had

amused themselves, they went to bed. But in the middle of the night, the shoemaker and his entire family felt as though they were being beaten. No sooner did it turn daylight than they found themselves back in their home more dead than alive. After a little time passed he and his wife became crazy and many of their children died.

*Pitrè collected this tale from a peasant in the presence of G. Curatolo in St. Cataldo.*

## 185. THE TEACHER AND THE GHOSTS

It's been told that there was once a prince who had a palace, but he couldn't live there because there was so much noise. Now, there was a poor teacher who couldn't pay for a house, and so he went to this prince and said to him, "My lord, would you let me enter your palace and let me live there? If you do, I'll make a pact with you: if I get rid of all the noise from your palace, your lordship will sell me the palace, and I'll pay you for it."

The prince agreed and gave him the keys to the palace. The poor teacher went to the palace, and all the people who lived nearby cried out to him, "You're really crazy if you think you can manage all the noise inside there!"

"I'm a baptized Christian," he responded, "the ghosts can't do anything to me."<sup>235</sup>

That evening he had nothing to do. Since he knew how to read, he went into the prince's library, took a book, and began to read. While he was reading, he noticed someone singing who said to him, "Pay attention and you'll see someone coming from there who will say this and that to you, and you're to say, yes, my lord."

Soon a man appeared who was all wrapped up and he asked something time and again, but the teacher didn't say anything. When the teacher didn't respond to the many voices, they abandoned him and went away. For three nights the wrapped figure continued to appear and spoke to him. It was always the same situation; he sang and said the same thing. During another three nights he appeared with many others who had many swords, and they cried out, "Take him! Grab him! Trap him!"

In response the teacher took a sword and began to fight with them. They

<sup>235</sup> Pitrè wrote that it was an old popular belief that if a man was baptized, he had nothing to fear from ghosts, and they could not curse him.

did the same thing for three nights. Then for another three nights he kept hearing guitars and violins. Everyone danced, and the teacher danced with them. When he could no longer dance, they left. Then for another three nights he saw a grand mourning procession and a large coffin and a woman walking behind it and crying. They all began to cry with the woman for three nights. On the last night they said, "Now, you can cry since you've held out for so long." Then they left the coffin and went away. The teacher found lots of money in the coffin. Then he paid the prince for the palace and remained rich and content.

*Collected by Mattia Di Martino at Noto.*

## 186. "FOR THE LONG MAY"

Once upon a time there was a husband and a wife, and the wife was rather stupid. When the husband went off to work, and the wife was left at home alone, she began thinking that they would have more room in the house if they got rid of all the grain they kept stored there. So when her husband returned from work, she asked him,

"My dear husband, when are we going to get rid of all this grain and have more room in the house?"

"When the Long May arrives," was his answer.

When the husband returned to work, his wife decided to stand at the front door every day, waiting to see if one of the passers-by might be the Long May.

Well, the whole town was soon talking about this, and when a certain disreputable fellow heard the story, he decided he would be the Long May. He walked down the street, and the woman called out to him,

"Are you the Long May?"

"Yes, indeed I am," he replied.

"Oh, if you only knew how long I've been expecting you!" she exclaimed. "Please come in and take away all this grain, as my husband said you'd do."

"Yes, I've talked to your husband, and that's what he told me to do."

Now this fellow happened to be a peddler of pots and pans—which came from Gallipoli—and he was happy to take away all the grain and store it in a warehouse. When he was taking the last load, the woman said to him,

"You really ought to give me a free load of pots and pans."

"Of course," he replied. "I'll go right now and get them."

And he promptly returned and gave them to her.

"Now," she said, "you must let me have a good look at your face so that I can describe you to my husband."

Well, that peddler, instead of showing her his face, pulled down his trousers and showed her his private parts.

Once the peddler was gone, the woman took all the pots and pans, bored a hole in the bottom of each, and threaded a cord through them. Then she drove a nail in each of two opposing walls of the house and strung the cord from one to the other, so that the pots and pans all hung there.

That evening, when her husband returned from work, she said to him,

"Oh, my dear husband, I've been so eager for you to return!"

"Why so?" he answered. "Do you have something special for me? Have you cooked something good for dinner?"

"No, not at all. But guess what happened today. The Long May finally came, and he cleared all that grain out of our house!"

"Oh, poor me!" exclaimed the husband. "Our house is emptied out of grain, and I brought this on myself!"

"Oh, just step this way and stop fretting," said the wife. And she led him into the next room and showed him how all the pots and pans were punctured and strung up.


"This time you've really done it, oh wife of mine!" he exclaimed. And when he heard the other details of the story,<sup>236</sup> he took a stick and gave her one beating for herself and another for the other people involved, and left the poor woman more dead than alive.

A story written, and a story told,

Now tell me yours, because my tale is old.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 187. THE STUPID WIFE

nce upon a time there was a husband and a wife. The wife had a very tattered skirt, and she was continually mending it. After watching her do this many times, the husband decided to buy his wife a new skirt. But the minute she had it, she began cutting the new garment into pieces and using them to mend her old skirt, patching it as thoroughly as she could.

<sup>236</sup> Apparently, this refers to the sexual motif of viewing the man's genitals instead of his face. The teller may have downplayed the full development of this element in the story.


When she had finished, she ran to find her husband, eager to show off her handiwork. She held up the mended skirt and said, "Look at what I've accomplished!" The woman actually expected to be praised.

Well, when her husband took one look at what she had done and saw that she had ruined the new skirt in order to preserve the old one, he gave her a sound thrashing that left her more dead than alive.

A story written, and a story told,  
Now tell me your tale, since mine is old.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 188. THE FIG-AND-RAISIN FOOL

nce upon a time there was a foolish son who would eat nothing but figs and raisins. His friends said to him, "Do you want to come with us to collect wood?" and he answered, "Will there be figs and raisins there?"

"If you want them," they replied, "we'll certainly get you some."

"All right, then, I'm coming," was his answer.

So he went with them to collect wood, and with much effort he amassed a huge bunch of branches.

"You dolt!" his friends exclaimed. "How do you expect to carry all of that back? Why don't you go find even more to pile on?" And then they went off to another spot.

Now the young fool, in his search for more wood, came upon a fountain, and there he saw three nymphs sleeping nearby in the shade with their faces exposed to the sun.<sup>237</sup> So the youth took some leaves and covered their faces. When the nymphs woke up, they realized that someone had passed by and had kindly shaded their faces to keep the sun from burning them. And so they said, "May the person who was so kind to us be granted whatever wish his heart desires."

Now at this moment the foolish youth had tied up his entire bundle of wood, and when he looked at its size, he exclaimed, "Now that you're all tied up, who's going to carry you? You should be carrying me!"

All at once the bundle of wood got underneath him and carried him all the way back to Palermo and right to his own front door. On the way, however,

<sup>237</sup> Pitrè observes that this is the first appearance of nymphs in this collection of tales.

they passed through the street where the king's daughter happened to be looking out the window, and she burst out laughing at him.

"I wish I could make that maiden pregnant!" was the youth's response when he saw her.

And that's exactly what happened. As soon as the king became aware of his daughter's condition, he gave her a great scolding, while she insisted on her innocence. When she finally gave birth, the king proclaimed that once they found the man who was responsible, both he and the princess would be placed in a bronze barrel and thrown into the sea.

Then the king devised a scheme for discovering who the man was. He ordered that a three-day banquet be held, the first day for the nobility, the second day for the merchant class, and the third day for the common people. At each banquet he told his daughter's child to walk around and find his father. At the banquet for the nobility, the child made the rounds without identifying anyone. At the banquet for the merchants, the same thing happened. Now it was the day of the common folk's banquet, and the fool's friends all said, "Look, today all the commoners are invited to dine at the royal palace. Aren't you going to come?"

"Will there be figs and raisins there?" asked the young man.

"Oh, good grief! Always figs and raisins, raisins and figs! Of course they'll have that to eat as well, so why don't you come along with us?"

Once they were inside the palace, the young fool began to feel uncomfortable. He twisted this way and that, he stretched and he yawned, until finally it was time for the banquet, and the king said to the child, "Go and find your father."

The innocent young creature walked this way and that way and ended up directly in front of the fool. "This is my father," he declared.

"Oh, you stupid creature!" said the king to his daughter. "Were your eyes screwed in backwards?<sup>238</sup> You've managed to fall in love with a total fool! Oh, what a disaster! But just wait—I have a remedy for this."

And he ordered a bronze barrel to be built. Once it was finished, he had the fool and his daughter packed inside it and tossed into the sea. Now the fool was able to recount his whole story to the princess, beginning with his going to collect wood and his encounter with the nymphs.

"Do you recall," he asked, "when you saw me go by riding on the bundle of wood and you laughed at me? Well, that's when I said, 'I wish I could make that maiden pregnant.' "

238 A literal translation of the Sicilian idiom, *E chi hai l'occhi di prisuttu?* is: "What did you have for eyes—prosciutto?"

"Oh," replied the princess, "so those were the words I saw you muttering under your breath! Well, if you have such powers, why don't you bring this barrel back to dry land?"

And all at once they were back on land.

"Now make the barrel open and release us."

"If I do, will you give me figs and raisins?"

"Yes, my husband. Of course I will."

And in an instant they were outside the barrel.

Now that they were free, they purchased a large palace and surrounded it with a magnificent garden filled with every kind of delectable plant. Then they hired a guard to stand at the entrance and direct every passerby to read what was written above the portal:

*You may look, but you must not touch! Take a pear or a bunch of grapes, and you lose your life!*

Well, various people visited the garden, and among them was the father of the fool's wife, the king himself. The fool recognized him and said, "Could the king's pocket be hiding a bunch of grapes?" And in fact this was true.

"Seize that thief!" he shouted to his guard. "Hold him right there!"

The king was at a loss for what to do,<sup>239</sup> and when they searched his pockets they found the grapes. The fool now declared that the king must be put to death. The king begged for mercy, asking the fool to take pity on him and spare his life. The fool consented, revealing his true identity to the king.

And so they all lived on, happy and content,

While we cannot even pay our rent.

*Collected by Giuseppe-Vincenzo Marotta in Cerda.*

## 189. SDIRRAMEDDU

**T**here once was a husband and a wife. The wife was a laundress, and the husband was a do-nothing. The wife would say, "Sdirrameddu, go and get some wood!" and he would reply, "Can I take the donkey?" and she would say yes.

Now, this wife had a brood hen, and when she went one morning to do the washing, she told Sdirrameddu,

239 "The king felt like a man captured by the Turks" is the original Sicilian, another example of how the memory of hostile relations with the Turks lived on in the form of traditional idioms.

"You'll have to put my hen with her chicks out in the sun."

"Yes, my wife, I certainly will do that," he replied.

So he took a large needle and lots of thread, and he threaded all the chicks together by their necks and set them out in the sun. By sunset, he piled up the dead chicks in a hamper, set the hen on top, and brought them back home. When his wife came back that evening, she asked him,

"Sdirrameddu, did you put the chicks out in the sun as I asked you?"

"Yes, my wife, and now they're all shriveled up like dried figs."

"What in the world did you do to make them dry up like that?"

"Take a look for yourself," he replied.

The woman took one look at the dead chicks and began tearing her hair in distress.

"Oh, Sdirrameddu, whatever am I going to do with you? First you won't fetch wood when I ask you, and then you kill all my chicks. I think it's best if you get out of the house."

"All right," he replied, "just let me have two donkeys, and I'll go get the wood."

"Why do you need two donkeys to fetch wood?"

"Because I'll ride on one of them and load the wood on the other."

And so, to please her husband, the woman agreed to let him have the two donkeys she used to carry her washing.

"Sdirrameddu, now you can go tomorrow morning and gather some wood for us," she said.

"Yes, my wife," he answered. "I'll go first thing in the morning."

So the wife arose at dawn and went off to do her washing, having first told her neighbor to be sure to wake up Sdirrameddu. The neighbor woke him up and told him to go and gather the wood. Then, as he was getting dressed, she saddled the donkeys. When Sdirrameddu came out and saw nobody there but the donkeys, he began asking aloud, "Who is going to help me on and off the donkey?"

The neighbor could hear him complaining, and so she came back out of her house and helped him onto the donkey.

"You hopeless creature!" she exclaimed. "Go and get some wood! Don't you understand that your wife works as a washerwoman so that you can have food on your table?"

And so Sdirrameddu went off to the forest, all the while saying to himself, "So I'm going to get some wood. But who will help me get off the donkey and then get back on again? And who will find the wood for me? And who will load it on the donkey? It would be best if I just eat my bread and drink my wine and then go back again."

And that's what he did.

When he arrived at his house, he began complaining aloud to the neighbors, "Who is going to help me off this donkey?"

But none of the neighbors was willing to help him, seeing that he hadn't brought back any wood, and they left him sitting there on the saddle until his wife finally returned.

"Lamebrain," she said, as soon as she saw him, "did you bring back any wood?"

"No, actually I didn't. Because first of all," he explained, "who was going to find it for me? And then who would have helped me onto the donkey? And then who would have helped me off the donkey? So the best thing was just to come back home."

So his wife had to help him down off the donkey, and then she gave him a thorough tongue-lashing.<sup>240</sup>

"Do you know what I think?" she asked him. "I think you should go and sell these two donkeys."

"Yes my wife, I can do that. Just tell me how much to ask for."

"Just take this purse and bring it back filled to the very top."

And so Sdirrameddu went to the fair to sell the donkeys. As he was walking along, he met a man he knew who asked him, "Sdirrameddu, where are you going?"

"Can't you see? I'm going to the fair to sell these donkeys."

"How much do you want for them?" asked the man. "I might buy them myself."

"Let me tell you, then: I want this purse filled to the top."

The man took the smallest coins he had and filled the purse with them.

Now that he had completed the sale so quickly, Sdirrameddu thought it would be a good idea to take the time to wash his clothes, so he stopped at a pond and undressed. He took the purse, which was red, and set it on top of a stone. But while Sdirrameddu was washing his underwear, a crow swooped down at full speed and made off with the purse. Because it was red, the crow had taken it for a piece of meat.

Sdirrameddu stopped washing and ran after the crow, all naked as he was and desperate to retrieve the purse. He kept jumping this way and that way, but to no avail, until finally it began to grow dark, and Sdirrameddu decided he'd better go home. When he came to his front door, he crawled and

240 A literal translation of the Sicilian expression, *lu jinchiu di tanti parulazzi*, is: "she filled him up with so many curse words." The augmentative *parulazzi* has a strong negative connotation.

scratched at the door like a pig. His wife, thinking the pigs were at the door, picked up a pitchfork to drive them away with.

“Shoo! Scat!” she shouted as she opened the door.

“Oh, my wife, put down the pitchfork, it’s only me!” he replied.

“How come you’re all naked?” asked his wife. “And what did you do with the donkeys?”

“Oh, my wife, just put me to bed and bring me something to eat, and then I’ll tell you everything.”

So she got him into bed and brought him some food, and then she inquired,

“Now, what is the story behind all this?”<sup>241</sup>

“Listen, wife, to what happened. I did sell the donkeys for the sum you told me to, but then I decided to wash my shirt, and when I set the purse on a stone, a crow snatched it away. And so this is my story.”

When Sdirrameddu’s wife heard all this, she began tearing her hair out. Then she grabbed him by an arm and a leg and dragged him head first out of bed and onto the floor. Then she took a cane, gave him a thrashing and drove him out the door.

A story written, and a story told,

Now tell me your tale, since mine is old.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 190. GIUFÀ

### 1. Giufà and the Plaster Statue

**T**here’s a tale I heard about a mother who had a son named Giufà. This mother lived in poverty, and her son Giufà was a simple-minded and lazy rogue. His mother had a piece of cloth and said to Giufà, “Take this piece of cloth, and go sell it in the village. Make sure you sell it to a person who doesn’t talk too much.”

So Giufà departed with the cloth with the intention of selling it. When he arrived in the village, he began shouting, “Who wants to buy some cloth!”

He cried out to the people and began to speak to some who talked a great deal and to some who refused to buy his cloth because he demanded too

<sup>241</sup> A literal translation of the Sicilian expression, *Comu stu focu granni?* is “How come such a great fire?”



much. Giufà made certain not to sell the cloth to people who talked a great deal. He walked here and there until he entered a courtyard. Nobody was there except a plaster statue, and Giufà spoke to it: "Do you want to buy this cloth?"

The statue didn't say a word, and seeing that it spoke very little, Giufà said, "Since you don't speak much, I've got to sell the cloth to you."

So he took the cloth and hung it over the statue.

"Tomorrow, I'll return for the money." And he went away.

The next day he came for the money and found that the cloth had been taken.

"Give me the money for the cloth," he demanded, but the statue said nothing.

"Well, if you won't give me the money, I'll show you who I am!" And he ran to borrow a hammer, and when he returned, he smashed the statue until it fell to pieces, and he found a jar of money inside it. He put the money into a sack and went to his mother. When he arrived home, he said to his mother, "I sold the cloth to some one who didn't talk much, but he didn't give me any money last night. So I went back this morning with a hammer to kill him. When he fell to the ground, he gave me this money."

His mother, who was smart, replied, "Don't tell any one about this. Little by little we'll devour all this money."

*Told by Giuseppe La Duca and collected by Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

## 2. Giufà and the Piece of Cloth

Another time his mother said to him, "Giufà, I have this piece of cloth that's got to be dyed. Go to the dyer who dyes the cloth green or black and leave it at his shop."

Giufà put the cloth over his shoulder and left. As he was walking he saw a large beautiful snake, and seeing that it was green, he said, "My mother has sent me, and she wants this cloth dyed green. Tomorrow I'll come and get it." And he left it there.

When he returned home, and his mother heard what he had done, she began to tear out her hair. "Ah, you fool! You'll be the end of me! . . . Run back and seen if it's still there!"

Giufà went back, but the cloth was gone.

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

### 3. Giufà and the Judge

It's been told that Giufà went out one morning to gather wild herbs to eat, and before he returned to his village, it became dark. While he was walking, the moon appeared, but it was cloudy, and the moon kept disappearing and reappearing. He sat down on top of a rock, and began to watch the moon that disappeared and reappeared, and each time it appeared and disappeared, he cried out, "It's coming! It's coming! It's hiding! It's hiding!"

Meanwhile there were some thieves nearby, and they happened to be skinning a calf that they had stolen. When they heard, "It's coming! It's hiding!" they were frightened that the law officers were coming, and they ran away and left the meat behind them. When Giufà saw them running away, he went to see what was there and found the skinned calf. He took his knife and began to cut off some of the meat and filled his sack with it. Then he left, and when he arrived home, he said to his mother, "Here I am."

"How come you're so late?" his mother asked.

"I'm late because I've brought you some meat, and tomorrow you're to sell all of it because I need the money."

"Tomorrow I want you to go into the countryside, and I'll sell the meat," his mother said.

The next day Giufà went into the countryside, and his mother sold the meat. At night, Giufà returned and said, "Did you sell the meat, mother?"

"Yes, I gave it to the flies on credit."

"And when will they give you the money?"

"When they have it."

A week passed, and the flies did not bring the money. So Giufà went to the judge and said, "Your honor, I want justice. I gave the meat to the flies on credit, and they haven't come to pay me."

"Well, then I'll sentence them to be killed by you," the judge said.

Just at that moment a fly landed right on the head of the judge, and Giufà gave him such a blow with his fist that he broke the judge's head.

*Told by Giuseppe La Duca and collected by Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

### 4. Giufà and the Man with the Cap

Giufà did not like to think about working. Rather, he preferred the art of loafing: eat, drink, and do nothing. His mother became infuriated and kept saying to him, "Giufà, that's no way to behave! You don't even make an attempt to lift a finger! You just eat and drink. Nothing's important to you."

... I'm not going to put up with this any longer. Either you go and earn some money, or I'll kick you out of the house!"

Well, Giufà went off to the avenue called the Casseru to get some clothes. He went around to the merchants and bought this and that from them until he was all dressed up and even had a beautiful red cap (for in those days everyone wore a cap, not like now when even the most miserable teacher wears a top hat or a bowler). But Giufà didn't have any money, and therefore, he didn't pay anything. Instead, he said to all the merchants: "I'll buy these things on credit for now. I'll come and pay you in the next few days."

When he took a look at himself and saw that he was smartly dressed, Giufà said to himself, "That's it! Now my mother won't be able to say anymore that I'm a loser. But how am I going to pay the merchants? ... I've got it! I'll pretend to be dead, and we'll see what happens."

So he threw himself on the bed and began to cry out: "I'm dying! I'm dying! ... I'm dead!"

Then he posed himself with his hands crossed on his chest and his feet straight as sticks. His mother began to pull out her hair and shout, "My son! My son! What misfortune! How could this happen? My son!"

When the people heard her cries, they ran from everywhere, and everyone commiserated with the old woman.

As word spread about Giufà's death, the merchants went to see him, and as they stood in front of his corpse, they said, "Poor Giufà, he owed me six gold coins for the pair of pants I sold him (so I supposed) ... Well, I pardon the debt!"

And this is what each one of them did. They pardoned him and released him from his debts until Giufà was free of all of them. However, the merchant who had sold him the red cap was somewhat resistant and said to himself, "In no way will I leave him the cap." But since the cap was on Giufà's head, the merchant had to wait until the evening when the gravediggers carried the dead man into the church before the burial. After making sure that nobody had noticed him, the merchant slipped away into the church and hid himself.

After a while—it must have been around midnight—some thieves entered the church with the intention of dividing a sack filled with money that they had robbed without anyone seeing them. Giufà didn't stir on the catafalque and the merchant who was after the red cap remained behind a door holding his breath. The thieves poured out the money on top of a table; they were all silver and gold coins, for in those days silver flowed like water! The money was divided into as many piles as there were thieves, but there were twelve coins left over, and they didn't know who should get them.

"To avoid a long discussion," one of the thieves said, "let's do it like this.

Here's this dead body. Let's toss the coins at him, and whoever lands a coin in his mouth, gets all twelve of them."

"Great, great," the others agreed and got ready to aim the coins at Giufà's mouth.

But as soon as Giufà became aware of what they were about to do, he rose up from the catafalque and began to yell in a loud voice, "Rise up all ye dead ones!"

Before anyone knew what was happening, the thieves left everything standing and ran off as fast as they could, calling out to all the saints to save them. When Giufà saw that he was alone, he got up and walked over to the piles of coins. At the same time the merchant who had remained behind the door without making a peep, left his hiding place and went to the table to take over the money. In short, the two of them reached an agreement and divided the money in half. However, there were five coins left over.

"These coins are mine," Giufà said.

"You're wrong. These five coins are mine!" the merchant replied.

"No, the five coins belong to me!" Giufà insisted.

"Get out of here! They don't belong to you. The five coins are mine!"

At this point, Giufà grabbed a stick to hit the merchant in the head, and he rushed at him yelling, "Give me those five coins! I want those five coins!"

Meanwhile, the thieves who had not given up hope of regaining their money, began to make their way back to the church to see what the dead had done. As they approached the door, they heard the bickering and all the confusion about the five coins.

"What a miserable affair!" they said. "Who knows how many of the dead have arisen from their graves! They only have five coins for all of them, and there's not enough money to share!"

And they scrambled away as fast as their feet could carry them.

In the end, Giufà took possession of the five coins and headed toward his home with his little sack of money.

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 5. Giufà and the Morning Singer

During Giufà's times, so I've heard tell, there was a morning when he was still in bed and heard the sound of a pipe, and he asked his mother, "Who's that passing by?"

"It's the morning singer," his mother replied.

And each morning the morning singer passed by. But one morning Giufà got up and murdered the morning singer (for it was a man who played the

pipe). Then he went to his mother and said, "Mama, I've killed the morning singer."

When his mother heard that Giufà had killed the pipe player, she went and hauled the corpse back to her house. Then she threw it down into the dry well in the yard. However, when Giufà had murdered the man, there had been a witness at the scene, and he ran to alert the family of the dead man. Immediately thereafter, the relatives of the victim went and denounced Giufà at the court of justice, accusing Giufà of having murdered the morning singer.

Giufà's mother was cunning and decided to kill a ram and also throw it down into the well. Meanwhile, the judge, accompanied by the victim's family, went to see Giufà and interrogate him.

"Where did you carry the dead man?" the judge asked.

Giufà, who was stupid, answered, "I threw him into the well."

So, they tied a rope around Giufà and lowered him down into the well. When he reached the bottom, Giufà began to search for the corpse, and after touching the ram's wool, he cried out to the children of the dead man, "Did your father have wool?"

"No, my father didn't have any wool!" responded one of the children.

"This dead man has wool. So, he can't be your father," Giufà concluded, and then he touched the ram's tail. "Did your father have a tail?" he asked.

"Our father didn't have a tail," they replied.

"Well. This dead man here is not your father."

Giufà continued to feel around and touched the four feet of the ram.

"How many feet did your father have," he asked.

"My father had two feet," came the reply.

"This man has four feet," Giufà cried out. "He can't be your father!"

Finally, he touched the dead man's head.

"Did your father have horns?" he asked.

The children responded in chorus, "No, our father didn't have horns!"

"Well, this man has two horns. He can't be your father," Giufà concluded.

Now the judge intervened and said, "Giufà, I don't care if the man has wool or horns. Bring him back up here,"

So, they pulled up Giufà with the ram on his back. When the judge saw that it was really a ram, he let him go free.

*Told by Giuseppe La Duca and collected by Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

## 6. Giufà and the Semolina

Giufà's mother had a baby daughter whom she loved as much as her own eyes. One day she had to go to mass and said to her son, "Look, Giufà, I've got to go to mass. The baby's sleeping. Prepare the semolina for her and let her eat it."

So Giufà prepared a large pan of semolina. When it was cooked, he took a nice spoonful and stuck it into the baby's mouth. The baby began to shriek because it was too hot and she burned herself. After a few days, she died because her mouth developed gangrene. Giufà's mother became so fed up with her son that she took a stick and chased him out of the house with a good beating.

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 7. Giufà and the Washed Goatskin

When Giufà's mother saw that she couldn't support her son, she sent him to work for an innkeeper. Well, one day the innkeeper called him and said, "Giufà, go to the sea and wash this goatskin. But wash it well, otherwise I'll give you a good beating!"

Giufà took the goatskin and went to the seashore. He washed and washed, and after he spent the morning washing, he said to himself, "And now whom should I ask whether I washed the skin well?"

Meanwhile he noticed a ship that had just departed and was moving along the coast. He pulled out a handkerchief and began to make signals to the sailors.

"Hey, you!" he shouted. "Hey, you! Come here!"

The captain noticed him and said, "We'd better turn around, men. We might have left something on land."

When they reached land and disembarked, they went to Giufà.

"What's wrong?" they asked.

"Tell me, did I wash this goatskin well?"

The captain became infuriated and gave Giufà a good beating, causing him to cry.

"What am I to say now?" he moaned.

"You're to say," the captain responded, "Oh, Lord, let them go as fast as they can. This is the way we'll make up for lost time because of you."

So, with his shoulders in pain, he took the goatskin and went toward the inn repeating, "Oh Lord, let them go as fast as they can! Lord, let them go as fast as they can!" Along the way he met a hunter who was aiming at two

rabbits. And Giufà kept crying out, "Lord, let them go as fast as they can! Lord, let them go as fast as they can!"

Upon hearing this, the rabbits escaped.

"Oh, you son of a whore! Look at what you've done to me!" the hunter said to him and began to beat him with the butt of his gun. Giufà wept and wept and said, "What am I to say?"

"What are you to say? Well, you're to say, Lord, let them be killed! That's what you're to say!"

Giufà took the goatskin and began repeating what he was to say. Along the way he met two men who were quarreling with one another. And Giufà said, "Lord, let them be killed!"

"You scoundrel!" they yelled. "So you want to stir us up!" And they stopped arguing with each other and gave Giufà a sound beating. Poor Giufà, he was frothing at the mouth and couldn't talk. After a while, however, he asked sobbing, "But what should I say?"

"What are you to say?" they responded. "You're to say, Lord, let them be separated!"

And so Giufà began saying, "Lord, let them be separated! Lord, let them be separated!"

And he went on walking with the goatskin in his hand, repeating the same refrain. As he was walking, whom do you think he met? Two young people leaving the church just after they had married. When they were outside, they heard, "Lord, let them be separated! Lord, let them be separated!"

Well, the groom took off his belt and whipped the daylights out of Giufà.

"You think you can bring us bad luck!" he yelled. "You want to separate me from my wife!"

Giufà couldn't do anything to protect himself and fell to the ground as if he were dead. The relatives of the married couple approached Giufà to see if he was alive or dead. After a while, he revived and got up. Then the people asked him, "Don't you know what you're supposed to say to a married couple?"

"What am I supposed to say?" Giufà asked.

"You're supposed to say, 'Lord, let them laugh and be happy! Let them laugh and be happy!'"

So, Giufà took the goatskin and went toward the inn. At a certain point he passed a house where there was a dead man surrounded by candles, and his relatives were weeping all around him. Just at that moment, they heard Giufà saying, "Let them laugh and be happy! Let them laugh and be happy!" just as the people at the wedding had told him to do. So the relatives thought he was being contrary, and one of them took a hammer and gave him such a huge

beating that it was enough for him and for another as well. So, now Giufà finally understood that it was best to be silent and return to the inn. But as soon as the innkeeper saw him, he grabbed him and gave him a beating because he had sent him away early in the morning and Giufà had returned late in the evening. And then he fired him from his job.

*Told by a mechanic at the Oretea Foundry in Palermo.*

## 8. Eat, My Fine Clothing

Since Giufà was half a fool, nobody treated him very kindly. He was never invited anywhere, and nobody ever gave him a gift. One time Giufà went to a large farm and asked for something to eat, but as soon as the farmers saw him—dirty and poorly dressed as he was—it didn't take much for them to set the dogs on him. And he left much worse off than before. His mother understood the reason for the treatment he received and bought him a beautiful jacket, a pair of pants, and a velvet waistcoat.

Now, Giufà, dressed in an impressive way, went back to the farm, and you should have seen the great honors they bestowed on him! They even invited him to dine at the table. And they did this in a very ceremonious way. Giufà did not know how to read or write, and when the meal arrived, he stuffed food into his belly with one hand, and with the other he stuffed food into the pockets of his jacket and pants. And with each thing he saved in his jacket, he said "Eat, my fine clothing. After all, you're the ones who were invited."

*Told by Francesca Amato in Palermo.*

## 9. "Giufà, Pull the Door!"

One day, before Giufà's mother went to church, she said to her son, "Giufà, I'm going to mass. Take care, and after I close the door, make sure you pull it."

As soon she left, Giufà went to the door and began to pull it. He pulled and pulled so hard that it came off the hinges. He carried the door on his back and went to the church to bring it to his mother.

"Here's the door you told me to pull."

What do you think about this?!

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 10. Giufà and the Hen

Once upon a time, so it's been told, there was Giufà, and before his mother went out, she said to him, "I'm going to mass. Look after the hen that's about

to hatch her eggs. Take it and give it some bread and wine in a soup to eat, then put it back on the nest immediately so that the eggs don't get cold."

Giufà took the hen, prepared a soup of bread and wine, and stuck it in its throat with such force that the hen choked and died. When Giufà saw that the hen was dead, he said, "What am I going to do now? The eggs will get cold. I'd better get on top of them to hatch them."

So he took off his pants and sat down on the eggs. When his mother returned, she began looking for him.

"Giufà! Giufà!" she cried.

"Cluck, cluck, cluck!" he responded. "I can't come. I'm a hen, and I'm hatching my eggs. If you take me away from the nest, the eggs will get cold."

"You stupid fool, you! You've crushed all the eggs."

Giufà got off the nest, and all the eggs were a mess.

*Told by the master Vincenzo Aricò and collected by Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

## 11. Giufà and the Thieves

One time Giufà was passing through the countryside and he felt the urge to urinate. Do you know what happens in such cases? Once the urine hits the ground, it divides and flows off into many streams. So, when Giufà was finished, he turned to the streams and said, "You take that direction, you take this one, and you take the other side. I'm going this way."

And off he went.

Right below him, exactly below where he had pissed, there was a cave, and some thieves had gathered there to divide their money. When they heard Giufà's words, one of them said, "By Saint Disma!<sup>242</sup> The magistrates have come, and they're surrounding us!"

The thieves immediately ran from the cave and abandoned their money. As Giufà approached, he saw all their money and, without thinking twice, he took it away with him.

*Told by Francesca Amato in Palermo.*

## 12. "Owl's Eyes." "Oww! Oww!"

Giufà was supposed to bring some money home with him, and he was afraid of being robbed. So, what did he do? He put the money in a sack, and on top

<sup>242</sup> The patron saint of thieves.

he put thorns so that nobody would think he was carrying something important. He slung the sack over his shoulders and started out for home. Along the way, he met some young men, who asked him, "Giufà, what are you carrying?"

"Owl's eyes," he responded pointing to the silver coins that were shining.

The young men stuck their hands into the sack, and the thorns tore their skin.

"Oww! Oww!" they screamed.

And this is the way it went all the way home. Some one would ask, "Giufà, what are you carrying?" And he would respond, "Owl's eyes." They would stick their hands into the sack and cry out, "Oww! Oww!"

In the end Giufà reached home safe and sound and gave the money to his mother.

*Told by Francesca Amato in Palermo.*

### 13. Giucà<sup>243</sup> and the Bet

Once upon a time there was a landowner who decided to have some fun. One time during the winter he said to someone, "If you can spend the night on the beach near the sea, completely nude like on the day you were born, and survive by dawn, I'll give you a hundred gold coins. Otherwise, you'll lose your skin."

And to make sure that he didn't cheat, he called some guards and said, "Make sure you watch over him."

During the night a ship passed by, and the poor man who was on the beach stretched out his hands<sup>244</sup> as if he wanted to warm them in the light of the ship. When dawn arrived, the witnesses went to the landowner and said, "My lord, he remained nude the entire time, but at midnight, a ship passed by several miles off the coast. The ship was well lit, and the man was able to warm himself from the light."

"You've lost!" the landowner said to the poor man. "You warmed yourself, and therefore, you lost the bet."

The man who lost the bet went to Giucà's house and began weeping.

"Why are you crying?" Giucà asked him.

So the poor man told him the entire story and ended by saying, "The landowner claims that, by stretching out my hands toward the ship, I warmed them up. But how is such a thing possible? . . . And now I've lost the bet!"

243 In different regions of Sicily, Giufà was also known as Giucà.

244 The narrator stretched out his hands as if he wanted to warm them.

"Don't worry," Giucà responded. "I'm here. But tell me something: if I win this bet for you, will you divide the money fifty fifty?"

The poor man agreed. So, Giucà bought a basket of coal and a sheep.<sup>245</sup> He put the coal on the side of the convent of Cappuccini near Trapani and prepared a grill. He lit a fire at the convent of Cappuccini and then ran to the lodge at Scappuccini,<sup>246</sup> where he took the sheep and placed it on the grill. Then he began to rotate the spit of the grill without lighting the fire. Everyone who passed by and saw this strange operation (the sheep at the lodge and the fire at the convent) asked him what he was intending to do. And Giucà responded "I'm roasting this sheep."

About this time the landowner, who made the bet, passed by and said, "What are you doing Giucà?"

"I'm roasting this sheep."

"Where's the fire?"

"Over there at the Cappuccini convent."

"How can that be? You blockhead!"

"You're the real blockhead, you miserable thing!" Giucà responded. "How could that poor fellow ever warm his hands in the light of a ship that was ten miles off the coast? Just as I can't roast this sheep here, that poor man could not have warmed his hands!"

At this point he told what had happened to all the people around them, and the landowner was obliged to pay off the bet.

*This tale was told to Pitrè by Gaspare Stinco, thanks to the mediation of the librarian of Fardelliana, Giuseppe Polizzi, in Trapani.*

## 191. THE MAN WITH THE BET

Once upon a time there was a great scoundrel who found himself without a decent pair of shoes to wear. So, he went to a shoemaker's shop to find some. He tried one pair of shoes after another until, finally, he settled on a pair in which he looked quite elegant.

Suddenly, in the wink of an eye, he was out the door and running, with the new pair of shoes still on his feet. When the shoemaker saw him flee, he took off after him, shouting, "Stop that man! Stop him! He stole my shoes!"

<sup>245</sup> The narrator uses the word *crastu* in Sicilian or *castrato* in Italian. The word was also used for a sheep, and there is an obvious play on words.


<sup>246</sup> The two names Scappuccini and Cappuccini were used interchangeably.

When some bystanders attempted to grab the scoundrel, he had a ready response: "You can let go of me. It's all right! The two of us have made a bet."

When they heard this, the people let him go, thinking that the two men had made a bet as to which one could run faster. And so the poor shoemaker was tricked and ended up losing a pair of shoes.

*Told by Francesca Amato in Palermo.*

## 192. THE MAN WITH THE DONKEYS

nce upon a time there was a peasant who was leading a group of donkeys. They numbered thirteen, and he had another on which he was riding.

He went along like this until he came to a town that was holding a fair, and then he decided to ride around a bit and take in all the different sights. When it was time to leave and resume his journey, he counted his donkeys and found he had one less: there were now only twelve.

"Oh, woe is me!" he exclaimed. "I'm missing one donkey! What am I to do?" And then he counted them all again, "One, two, three, four. . ." until he arrived at twelve—because he wasn't including his own donkey. So he counted again, and still there were twelve, and the poor fellow began to cry because someone had taken one of his donkeys.

Along came a mule-driver who happened to know him.

"My friend, what's got you so upset?" he asked.

"Why am I upset? It's because I started out with thirteen donkeys, and now I have only twelve!"

"Really?" said his friend, and he began counting them himself, arriving at thirteen.

"Don't you see that there are thirteen?" said his friend.

"No, there are twelve, look: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, and twelve."

"But you're forgetting to count the one you're riding on."

When the peasant heard this, he replied, "You're right! I had one donkey underneath me, and I didn't notice it!"

*Told by Francesca Amato in Palermo.*

## 193. GO BRING IN THE HORSE!

Once upon a time there was a wagon-driver, and he took a pretty young woman as his bride. When the ceremonies were over and the two newly-weds were alone together, he said to her,

“Well, Rusidda, here we are, husband and wife. What bliss! Now I’m going to buy a horse, build myself a wagon, and go into business hauling loads, so that I can support us. But I have one thing to ask of you. When I come home from a day’s work, I don’t want to work a moment longer. So you, my dear little Rusidda, must help me by attending to the horse. You will remove his harness, bring him inside, and give him his water. This will all be your job, because I will be so tired.”

The young woman shrugged her shoulders and replied,

“Why should this be my job?”

“What are you saying? Do you think that *I* am the one who should be bringing in the horse?”

“But that’s something I don’t know how to do.”

“That’s no problem. I can teach you.”

“No, those are things I know nothing about. In my house no one ever taught me them.”

“Don’t worry, I can teach you now, a little bit at a time.”

“No, I’m sorry, but I just can’t bring in the horse.”

“But this is supposed to be your job.”

“I’m sorry, but I simply won’t do it!”

“I’m telling you you’d better do it, or it will end up badly for you.”

“No! Not now and not ever!”

At this the young man stood up angrily, having completely lost his temper, and said, “Now I’m ordering you: either bring in the horse or I’ll smack you one. Now go bring him in!”

“Absolutely not!”

“And I say bring him in!” And he gave her a great whack across her back.

His wife gave out a shriek as if she had been scalded.

“Oh! I’m dying! But I’m not bringing in the horse. No, I’m not!”

“I said go bring him in! And stop raising such a ruckus!”

Well, with “Go bring him in!” and “I’m not doing it!” they argued so loudly that the neighbors all came running.

“What’s going on here?” they asked. “You young people are just married, and already you’re having such arguments? And all over a horse? All right, let us settle it by bringing in the horse ourselves. Just tell us where he is.”

"Oh," replied the young man, "it was nothing more than a discussion. We actually haven't bought the horse yet."

"Well, then, bad luck to both of you! All this sound and fury over nothing!"

*Told by Francesca Amato in Palermo.*

## 194. THE PEASANT AND THE MASTER

One day some peasants were having a conversation with their master, and they were talking about sheep and cheese, when one of the peasants said that he had wanted to bring a present of cheese, but the mice had eaten it all up. So the master, who was rich, fat, and haughty, called him an ass and told him that it wasn't possible for the mice to have eaten all the cheese. All the others who were there said that the master was right and the peasant, wrong. What more could the poor man say? Well, one thing led to the next, and after a while, the master said that he had taken good care to rub his ploughshares with oil to keep them from rusting but that the mice had eaten off all the points. So now the peasant who had spoken about the mice and the cheese said, "But master, how's it possible that the mice can eat the points of your plowshare and not my cheese?"

"Shut your mouth, you ass!" the master and the others shouted. "Shut your mouth, you ass! Don't you see the master's right!"

*Collected by Antonino De Stefani-Perez in St. Ninfa.*

## 195. THE MADMAN

Once there was a gentleman who paid a visit to the hospital's insane asylum. Among the people he met there was a madman who treated him with great respect and then decided to accompany him when he departed.

A short way along the road the madman stopped and said to the gentleman, "What would you give me in exchange for some good advice?"

"What would I give you?" replied the gentleman. "Here, take a penny." And he handed him the coin.

When the coin was in the madman's hand, he said, "*Never go near the factories.*"

“Well,” thought the gentleman when he heard this, “that’s reasonable enough advice.”

After they had gone a bit further, the madman turned to him and asked, “If I give you another piece of advice, can I have another penny?”

The gentleman thought for a second and replied, “All right, here’s another penny,” and he handed the man a second coin. The man took it and said, “*Be careful when you come to the crossroads*” (meaning he should watch out for the carriages).


The gentleman frowned at this, thinking it rather pointless, but still he was reasonably satisfied. Finally, the madman said to him,

“And now, if you give me three coins, I can give you advice that’s worth more than all the rest.”

“All right, three more coins and that’s it!” said the gentleman, as he handed over the money. As soon as the madman had the coins in his hand, he said, “*Never talk to madmen!*” and he gave the man a great slap in the face and ran off. The gentleman saw the wisdom of this and had learned it at his own expense.

*Told by a townsman in Palermo.*

## 196. THE RIDDLE

nce upon a time there was a man who made his living by robbing and stealing, and he always managed to escape. Finally he was arrested. He was taken to court and sentenced to serve a long term in prison where he was only allowed to drink wine.

The poor man had a married daughter who loved her father very much, and she went to visit him every day in prison. Meanwhile she became despondent because her father suffered so much and was deprived even of a small jug of water. The guards searched her from head to foot to prevent her from smuggling anything into the prison, and the daughter racked her brains to think of a way she could bring something to ease the sufferings of her father.

One day she thought: “Don’t I have milk for my son? I come from my father, so I can give him some.”

She returned to the prison and went to the grated window where her father was staying and gave him her breast through the bars. The poor father felt that he was being reborn, and he blessed his daughter for this proof of her affection. The day after and for many other days, the daughter kept on doing this. In short, she sustained him for one entire year with her own milk.

The judge couldn't understand how the prisoner could survive just on wine alone, and after visiting him, he left and said: "What's going on here? I thought that this man wouldn't be able to survive even a month. Instead he's alive and in the best of health."

One day the daughter went to the judge and said, "Your honor, I know a riddle that nobody has ever solved. If not even you can succeed in solving it, will you grant my father a pardon?"

"What's the riddle?" the judge asked.

"Not yet! First you must promise me that you'll grant my father a pardon, and then I'll tell it to you."

"All right," the judge consented. "If in three days I haven't solved your riddle, I shall free your father."

At this point the young woman recited the riddle:

"The year before I had a father.  
This year I have a son  
And the son who takes my milk  
Is the husband of my mother."

The judge began to think about this. He told the young woman to return in three days. But on the third day, when the daughter returned, he was still puzzled by the riddle.

"Well now, your honor, what does my riddle mean?"

"All right, you little gossip," the judge responded. "Tell me whatever you want! I haven't been able to solve it. Explain it to me, and I'll set your father free."

So the daughter said, "I'm the daughter of the prisoner, and each day I nourish him with my breast through the iron bars of the window. That's why he's still in good condition and in the best of health."

The judge began to weep upon hearing this. He took pen and paper and wrote the following sentence: "Free the father of this girl who has managed to save him from death."

They remained happy and content  
and we cannot even pay the rent.

*Told by Giovanni Patuano, a blind man, in Palermo.*

## 197. THREE GOOD PIECES OF ADVICE

There was a man who left his town for a foreign country where he was hired to serve an abbot. After serving him faithfully for a considerable time, he felt a strong desire to see his wife and his native village again. So he said to the abbot,

"My lord, I have served you for all this time, but now I feel a need to return to my own village."

"Of course, my son," answered the abbot. "But before you leave, I must give you the three hundred coins you've accumulated in wages. Will three hundred gold coins satisfy you, or would you rather have three good pieces of advice?"

"I'll take the three good pieces of advice," answered the servant.

"All right, then. Pay attention.

*First:* He who abandons the old road for the new,  
Ends up with troubles he never knew.

*Second:* Observe much and say little.

*Third:* Always think before you act:  
reflection is a beautiful practice.<sup>247</sup>

And now take this bread with you, and break it when you've discovered true happiness."

And so the good man was sent on his way.

After walking quite a bit, he encountered some other travelers who said to him,

"We know a short cut we're going to take. Will you come with us?"

But the man remembered his master's three pieces of advice, and so he replied,

"No thank you, my friends. I'll stay with the road that I'm now on."

He kept walking, and eventually he heard some gunshots: bang! bang!

"What could that be?" he thought. "Aha! Those men were thieves, and they've just murdered their companions. So now I've earned my first hundred coins." And he continued on his way.

<sup>247</sup> The Sicilian originals are:

Cu cancia la via vecchia pi la nova,  
Li guai ch' 'un va cercannu ddà li trova.

Vidi assai e parra pocu.

Pensa la cosa avanti chi la fai,  
Ca la cosa pinsata è bedda assai.

He walked on and on until finally he came to a trattoria and realized how hungry he was. So he sat down and ordered a meal. They brought him a huge platter of meat that simply cried out to be eaten. But when he put in his fork and stirred it, he froze with fear: it was human flesh served up as meat! His first impulse was to demand how such a thing could be allowed and to give the restaurant owner a great bawling out—but then he recalled the second piece of advice, “observe much and say little,” and so he just kept quiet.

When the owner arrived with the check, he simply paid it and began to take his leave. But the owner stopped him with these words:

“Hurray! Congratulations! You’ve just saved your life! All those who raised questions about my meat were spared the need to go to St. Peter’s for penance. They did their penance right here and were killed and cooked for meat.”

“I’ve earned my second hundred coins,” thought the man, who realized how lucky he was to still be alive by now.

When he finally reached his village and his own little house, he noticed that the front door was slightly ajar. He went in and found no one there. But as he glanced at the middle of the room, he saw that a small table was beautifully set for two, with two glasses, two place settings, and two chairs drawn up.

“How can this be?” he said. “I left my wife all by herself, and now I find the table set for two! There’s something fishy going on here!”

He decided to squeeze himself into a hiding-place under the bed so that he could observe what would happen next. He hadn’t been there a minute when he saw his wife enter. She had gone out momentarily to get a pitcher of water. A little while later a young priest entered, clean-cut and handsome, who took a seat at the table.

“Ah, so that’s it!” the man thought to himself, and was about to come out and give them both a sound beating. But then he recalled the abbot’s last piece of advice,

“Always think before you act:  
Reflection is a beautiful practice.”

And so he restrained himself and waited. He watched as the two of them sat down at the table together. But then, before beginning the meal, his wife turned to the young priest and said, “My son, let’s recite our customary paternoster in honor of your father.”

When the man heard this, he came out from under the bed weeping and laughing for joy. Then he embraced each of them, and it would have melted your heart to see them. At the same time he remembered the bread that the abbot had given him. It was to be eaten when he discovered true happiness. So

he broke open the bread, and the three hundred gold coins came pouring out all over the table. His master had hidden them inside the bread.

And so they lived on, in contentment and peace,  
While we just sit here and clean our teeth.

*Collected in Palermo by Prof. Carmelo Pardi.*

## 198. THE STORY OF THE RIDDLE

Once there was a king who went hunting, and when he was caught in a rainstorm, he sought shelter at the hut of a poor peasant. This peasant had a talented daughter, a maiden so exceptionally gifted that she could snatch birds from the air.<sup>248</sup> While the king was a guest in their house, they gave him the very best they could offer, and he was favorably impressed. As soon as the rain stopped and the king returned to his palace, he called one of his footmen and gave him several gifts—a round cake, a ricotta cheese, a kid, and a precious gold coin—and said, “Take all this to that peasant and tell him that he should eat these things today for my sake.”

But this footman was a terrible glutton, so the first thing he did as he walked along was to break off pieces of the cake and nibble away half of it. Then he took off a quarter of the kid and roasted it. Next he removed the ricotta from its casing and ate half of it. And finally, he changed the gold coin and kept half of its value for himself. Then, when he arrived at the peasant’s hut, he declared, “The king has sent me with some gifts: these are things he’d like you to eat for his sake.”

Now the daughter understood at once that the king would never be capable of sending such half-gifts, and so she said, “Oh, you shouldn’t have gone out of your way just for our sake! But when you return to the king, please do recite to him the following words:

‘The months of the year are twelve,  
So why now six?  
The housing was unhoused,  
Containing half.  
Four limbs were walking here,

<sup>248</sup> *Di lu tantu talentu ch’avìa pincia aceddi pi l’aria*, a metaphor for describing ingenuity that has appeared earlier in these stories.


But three arrived.  
 The moon is just five-tenths.  
 Go figure this.' "

Well, the footman, fool that he was, carried back this very message, and the king understood at once that his messenger had eaten half of the presents. First, he had him severely punished. Then, he thought of how clever the young woman had been, and realizing her true value, he took her as his wife.

And so they lived on, happy and content,  
 While we remain here without a cent.

*Told by Francesca Amato in Palermo.*

## 199. THE STORY OF THE SONG

nce upon a time there was a prince, and also a poor young woman who was very beautiful, and the prince was smitten with her. The young woman's grandmother, however, distrusted the way the prince pursued her, thinking that it sullied her honor. And so she said to him, "No, you can't have her. Go find some other maiden to corrupt, but it won't be my granddaughter."

Nevertheless, this prince continued to feed the flames of his desire.

Whenever the grandmother went to do her washing, she always kept the young maiden locked up safely at home, and because of her great beauty she never allowed anyone to see her. But the prince, driven by his great desire, began making secret visits to the house, unobserved by his mother and father, who disapproved of his courting the maiden because she was so poor. He would bring the young woman household objects as presents in keeping with his royal status, and he kept saying that he wanted her as his wife.

When his father, the king, heard this, he said, "I must find you a different maiden to marry, and she will be someone exceedingly ugly but very rich."

"I don't want someone like that," replied his son. "I want this one." But eventually he brought himself to say negative things about the young woman. "She's not really a good choice after all. She's the daughter of a washer-woman." And yet, even as he made his lips pronounce these words, the heart in his breast was in great turmoil. When he finally went and married the ugly one, he became even more inwardly tormented, and this led to his falling seriously ill.

So, now that this young prince was ill, what did the maiden do?

“How can I arrange things so that I get to speak to him?” she said. “The new bride is going to lose her husband, and he is going to lose his life. How am I going to bring this about? First, I’ll dress up like a man with a guitar slung over my shoulder. Then, I’ll go strolling under the palace window, and I’ll take care of what comes after that.”

So that evening she dressed up like a man and went to sing under the palace window:

“You can have the poor one, and for free,  
With no concern for finery and gold.  
These things will vanish like the wind,  
But a beautiful woman is here to enjoy.  
So come out, handsome one, for my song.  
Come out—and you’ll see how life ends.”<sup>249</sup>

And so the young prince came forth, and the young woman shot him, and he was killed on the spot. Then all the people began asking:

“Who was it?”


“Who did it?”

And someone said, “It was a man. A man did it!”

But there was no way to know. And all the while it was the poor young lover whom the prince had constantly desired.

*Told by Pietra Ferraro in Montevago.*

## 200. PETER FULLONE AND THE EGG

nce upon a time Peter Fullone, the stonecutter, was working in the cemetery near the church of Santo Spirito, and a man passed by and said, “Peter, what is the best thing for a man to eat?”

Peter turned to him and replied, “An egg,” and that was it.

One year later, Peter Fullone was again working at the same place. He was seated on the ground and cutting stones. The same man who had passed by the year before passed by again and asked, “Peter, with what?”

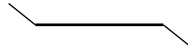
249 Pigghia la bedda e pigghiala pi nenti,  
’Un ti curari di robba e dinari,  
La robba si ni va comu lu ventu  
E di la bedda ti ni po’ prijari;  
Affaccia, beddu, e sentimi cantari,  
Affaccia e vidira’ comu si mori.

“With salt,” Peter Fullone responded, for he had such a sharp mind that he remembered something that a man had asked a year ago.

Now this Peter Fullone was a great natural poet, and they tell many stories about the poetry contests that he had with Viniziano, the learned man of Tripi, and indeed with all the finest poets of Sicily. And yet, that poor unfortunate man didn’t get enough bread to eat and wore himself out working as a stonecutter.

*Told by Francesca Amato in Palermo.*

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# Legends and Ghost Stories



## 201. THE FISHERMAN VITU LÛCCHIU

At the time when the Turks took many Sicilians prisoners, there was a man by the name of Vitu LucchIU who used to fish for polyps. One day a Turkish ship came along the cape of Saint Theodore, and the Turks attacked him and his twelve-year-old brother. As soon as the fisherman Vitu realized what was happening, he took a spear and killed one of them. In his rage he drove them all into the sea. Then he threw another spear and hit one more Turk, while nobody was able to overcome this man! Then he threw another spear and killed another Turk and yet another. Finally, he became exhausted and was taken prisoner. Off he went together with his brother to Tunisia.

Once they arrived there, the Turks took him to the market to sell. A merchant came, and he bought Vitu LucchIU and took him to the country ten or eleven miles away near a beach where he put him to work. After six or seven months of working there with his brother, Vitu said to the other men who were with them, "Do you want to come with me? If you trust me, I'll get you out of here."

"Go to it, Vitu," all of them said. "We're ready."

They all agreed.

That Sunday, the master locked them all up with his key. When they saw that he had left, they managed to get out and flee the place. But the poor men, at a certain point, could go no further and were caught by the Turks, who brought them back to the place where they had to do their usual work. The next day the merchant returned and found them all working.

After a week passed, Vitu proposed once again that they escape. Only one of the eight refused to leave. They grabbed hold of him and put a gag in his mouth. Then they fled for their lives to the seashore. There they saw a beautiful ship ready to sail, and all the Turks were asleep, some down below, others wrapped in blankets as though they were barrels scattered on the deck. The fisherman Vitu jumped into the sea, swam to the ship, and used his legs to propel himself on board. Then he signaled to the others, and all of them climbed on board, one after the other. When one of the Turks woke up under his blanket, he exclaimed, "Oh, by Mohammed!" and grabbed his sword.

"A lousy Turk!" Vitu responded, and he took his saber, crawled under the cover, killed the Turk, and took his armor. The battle became fierce, for they saw another man.

“Lousy Turk!”

They pulled out their sabers, and when the Turk lifted his sword, they cut off his head. There had been seven Turks, and out of the seven, five remained, and they were still sleeping. Vitu lifted the anchor and set sail. When they were on their way in the middle of the sea, the boat began to move in such a way that two other Turks came on deck. When they saw the strangers, the Turks took out their swords, and Vitu, like Jesus Christ, killed both of them, and now only three were left, the captain of the ship, and two others. When the captain appeared, he took out his pistol and saber and shot at Vitu, who avoided the bullet. He thrust his saber and cut him in half. Now there were only two of the seven left.

They set sail for Trapani. It was clear that they had stolen the ship. The Turkish king gave orders: “Keep a lookout to see where those pirates are heading! Keep a lookout!”

The king ordered a schooner to set sail and to follow them, and they caught sight of the ship. The two Turks who were below the deck on the ship intended to sink it, but the fisherman Vitu went down below. “You treacherous dogs! You lousy Turks!” And he gave it to them. Then he took charge of the ship and saw that the Turkish schooner was getting near. *Keep sailing, keep sailing!* But the schooner stayed hard on its heels. Poor Vitu, there was nothing he could do but try to get the ship to safety, as the schooner came closer and closer. Finally, they managed to reach Mazzara where they landed and went to the health officials and were put in quarantine. The two Turks were with them as their prisoners, and they said they were willing to exchange them for a man who the Turks on the schooner held prisoner. It was the brother of the fisherman Vitu. And it was Vitu who arranged the trade with the Turks at Mazzara, where he claimed his brother.

And this is the story of the valorous fisherman Vitu Lucchiu.

*Told by Nicisio Catanzaro nicknamed Baddazza at Trapani.*

## 202. THE CAPTAIN AND THE GENERAL

**I**t's been told time and again that there was once a king in Sicily, and this king had a son who was twenty-one and had no desire to marry. The king continually gave advice to his son, but nothing helped. Finally, from one day to the next, he got married and wed the youngest daughter of a king. After the marriage festivities, the young prince went to his room and was

completely melancholy and irritable. So his wife asked, "What's the matter? What's bothering you?"

"What's the matter? Well, I'll tell you, my Teresina. I want us to swear to each other that, after the first one of us dies, the other must keep guard at the tomb for three days after the burial."

"I thought it might be something like that. Well, it's nothing!" his wife said.

So he took out a sword that had a cross on the hilt, and they kissed it to solemnize their oath. One year later, on the day of their anniversary, Teresina fell ill and died. The prince held a grand funeral, and that night he took a sword, two pistols, gold and silver coins, and departed. He went to the sexton and had him open the church and the tomb. Then, before he descended down into the tomb, he said to the sexton, "You're to come here in three days and listen at the tomb to see whether I've knocked. If I haven't knocked by the evening, it will mean that I'll never return."

The prince rewarded him with one hundred coins, and once he was at the bottom of the tomb, he opened the coffin, lit the torch, looked at his wife, and began to weep. The first night passed, and at the beginning of the second, he heard a noise in the middle of the coffin. All at once a ferocious snake appeared with many little snakes. When the snake threw itself upon the dead woman, the prince summoned his courage, grabbed the pistol, fired, and killed the snake. The other little snakes scampered away. After a while, they returned with their mouths filled with herbs, and they put them on the snake's wound, eyes, and mouth and all over its body. Then the snake came back to life, raised itself, and fled. The prince was astonished. He took the herbs and put them in his wife's mouth and rubbed them all over her body, and she was revived.

"Ahh, how long have I slept?" she asked.

The prince lifted her on top of the coffin, and as he looked around nervously, he noticed the hole where the snake had come from. Then he took his wife by her arm and began to push her through the hole. Together they got through the hole and landed in the middle of a stone cave. He gave his wife something to eat, and then he saw a great amount of those herbs which had brought her back to life. After he gathered a large bunch of the herbs, off they went to Paris in France, where they took their lodgings in a palace near the river of the city.

After some time had passed, the prince decided to become a merchant and said, "Teresina, I don't want to stay here. I prefer to travel about as a merchant."

So he hired an honest woman with good manners to serve as his wife's domestic while he prepared to take a journey for a month. Before he

departed, he told her that, when he returned, he would signal her with three cannon shots. So, he left, certain that his wife was in good hands. Unfortunately, one day a captain in the Neapolitan army passed by the house, saw Teresina, and winked at her. Since Teresina would have nothing to do with him, he called an old woman and said to her, "Grandma, I'd like to ask you a favor. There's a maiden who lives in this palace, and I'd like to have a word or two with her. I'll give you two hundred coins if you help me."

The old woman went to the maiden, and after much ado, she convinced Teresina that she had to hide all the possessions of her house, or they would be confiscated.

"I've got a house full of stuff," the old woman said, "and they want to take it all away from me. My lady, would you let me bring it here for safekeeping?"

"All right, you can bring it," the maiden responded.

The old woman went straight to the captain and told him everything. So he bought a large chest and got inside, and the old woman had the chest carried to Teresina. That night, when the captain saw that she was asleep, he climbed out of the chest, took Teresina to a ship, and carried her away.

At the end of the month her husband came back and fired the cannon three times to signal his return, but he didn't see his wife on the balcony. So he got off his ship right away and went to his house. When he couldn't find his wife, he sold all the merchandise and went off to Naples, where he enlisted as a common soldier in the army. One day, the king held a great feast, and the troops were released from work. Each captain had his wife on his arm. The prince, who was now a soldier, recognized his wife with the captain. His wife also recognized her husband, and said, "Captain, my husband's here. What should I do?"

The captain glanced at him and realized that the prince was a soldier in his company. So he invited some of the sergeants and corporals to lunch. (The prince was a sergeant, a lowly non-commissioned officer.) While they were eating, the captain spoke to the cook and told him to place a silver set in the sergeant's coat pocket. Soon the servants discovered that a set of silver was missing, and they found it in the pocket of the innocent prince. A military council was assembled, and the sergeant was sentenced to death by a firing squad.

Now the sergeant had a loyal friend, also a soldier, and he said to him, "My friend, after the soldiers have shot me, I want you to create a large smoke screen. While the soldiers are carrying out the order of 'Shoulder arms,' take these herbs, put them in my mouth, rub them on the wounds, and get on your way."

Well, after he was shot, his friend put the herbs in his mouth, rubbed them on his wounds, and vanished in the middle of all the smoke. The prince returned to life, got up, and went into hiding.

Now, in a nearby country the daughter of a king happened to fall sick and was on the brink of death. None of the doctors could save her life. The king issued a decree that circulated throughout his kingdom, and it said, “Whoever succeeds in healing my daughter will have my daughter as his bride, and if he is married, I’ll make him a prince.”

The prince disguised himself as a doctor and appeared at the royal palace. Once he entered, he found himself in a salon filled with doctors. After he examined the sick princess, he knew that she was about to perish. Just at that moment, she gasped her last breath, and the prince said, “Majesty, your daughter is now dead, but I have a way to restore her health if you leave me completely alone with her.”

The king granted his wish. Once he was alone with the sick princess, he took out some herbs. After he put them in her mouth and nose, the princess began to breathe and was immediately cured. When the king saw her in such good health, he declared, “Doctor, my daughter is now your wife.”

“Majesty, pardon me, but I’m married.”

“Well, then tell me what you desire,” responded the king.

“Majesty, I want to be the general commander of all your regiments.”

“Very well, I grant you your wish.”

The prince was given the rank of general commander, and two great celebrations were prepared—one to celebrate the princess’s return to health and the second to honor the promotion of the prince to general. It was a grand holiday. The general invited the captains of all the neighboring regiments, including the captain responsible for his execution. After the captains had eaten, the general talked to a servant and ordered him to put a silver spoon into the coat pocket of that captain. Then, when it was discovered that a silver spoon was missing, they searched and found the spoon in the captain’s pocket and sent him to prison. Soon thereafter the general had him summoned to his presence and asked him, “Are you married or single?”

“Your lordship, I’m not married,” said the captain.

“What about your lady friend?”

The general ordered two soldiers to fetch the lady. When she recognized her husband, she became extremely frightened. Then he said to her, “Are you the wife of this captain?”

“No, my lord,” she replied. “I was kidnapped, and this captain brought me here.”

After she confessed, the general sentenced them to be covered with pitch

and burned to death. This is how all his trials and tribulations came to an end, and how the prince remained a general.

*Told by Agostino Vaccaro, a miner, and collected by Gaetano di Giovanni at Casteltermini.*

## 203. THE TUNA VICEROY

Gentlemen, there was once a fisherman who sold tuna fish at the Baddaro piazza in Palermo. One night he had a dream, and in this dream someone appeared and told him, “Do you want to know your destiny? Well, then go to the bridge of Ammiraglio di Ruggiero, and you will find your Fate under the bridge.”

Three nights in a row he had the same dream, and on the third night he went to the bridge, and beneath it he saw a poor man dressed entirely in rags. He was repelled by him and started to go away. But the man called to him, and the fisherman approached. It was his Fate, who said, “Look, tonight at midnight, go to the place where they empty the barrels of tuna fish. Climb in, and whatever you find is yours.”

The fisherman searched for a long pole and then hid himself during the night. At midnight he began to move about. He lifted a slab and found a ladder. Then he climbed down and found a large cave filled with gold coins and vases and pots and gold cheese. Then he closed and barred the entrance and climbed back up again. As soon as it became day, he went to exchange the money to take away the spell and take the enchanted treasures. The fisherman began to rise in society. He bought and sold houses; he bought and wore beautiful clothes. As the saying goes, *Love, beauty and money are three things that you can never hide.*

Now one time the King of Spain became involved in a war, but he had very little money. So he sent couriers to the noblemen of Palermo asking for a million crowns. The nobles knew the king lacked gold, but they didn’t know where to find a million crowns. The fisherman, who had learned how to read, discovered the announcement that said the king wanted a million coins. So he gathered together a million and brought the money to the palace of the viceroy.

“Your Excellency, I heard that our king needs a million crowns, and I shall gladly lend him a million.”

The viceroy looked at him in astonishment.

“If it’s the way you say it is, I’ll write to the king.”

“Send the money immediately,” the king replied.

The fisherman got together the million crowns and carried them in barrels to the viceroy. Then they were sent to the king who was dazzled.

“I shall now bestow a gift on this fisherman,” he said and wrote to the viceroy. “I want you to appoint the fisherman as the new viceroy, and you’re to come to Spain.”

When the viceroy received this news, he communicated everything to the fisherman. Then he placed all his powers in the hands of the fisherman and departed for Spain. Well, the fisherman didn’t have the slightest idea of what to do even though he was rich! Indeed, he wasn’t respected by anyone. He could have sounded the bells of alarm, but nobody would have come running. So, one day he wrote the king, “Your majesty, I don’t count for anything here. If I throw a party at the castle, nobody comes.”

“You have *carte blanche* to do whatever you want,” the king replied.

But the noblemen of Palermo didn’t want to listen to anything the fisherman had to say. When the fisherman saw how things were, he boarded a ship and traveled to Spain. In Spain the king received him with great honor and gave him lodgings in the royal palace. One day, the fisherman went down into the beautiful garden where he found some artichokes.

“Look at me!” he said, and he took out his saber and began slicing off the high heads of the artichokes. The Tuna Viceroy (for that’s how he was called) cried out, “Now I understand!”

He departed and returned to Palermo. And what were the first orders that he issued in Palermo? Well, he arranged for a ceremony where the nobles would have to kiss his hand as the new viceroy. None of the princes came. Then he gave orders to his guards: “Arrest that person and this person and so on and so on.” And he had all these princes executed. The odor of the bloodbath was sensed by everyone, and they began to call him “honored viceroy” or “Excellency.”

After this event the King of Spain could not pay him the million crowns, but he made the fisherman Prince of Pignatelli and Duke of Muntuliuni, and every year the people of these principalities brought him a great deal of money. And this is how the Pignatelli family founded its ancestry.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 204. THE KING AND THE PRISONERS

Once a King of Sicily visited one of his prisons where the condemned men had been sentenced to twenty and thirty years of imprisonment or life in prison. The prisoners formed a line as they waited for the king to pass by. When the king started to inspect them, he said to the first one, "You, why have you been sentenced? What did you do?"

"Me, your majesty! I'm innocent. They caught me while I was at my house."

"And you?" the king asked the second in line.

"I'm as innocent as Mary the Holy Virgin. When they arrested me, I was lying down in my bed."

"And you?" the king asked the third one.

"I was charged with having killed someone. But they were all lies, and I've been wronged."

In short, no matter whom he asked, all the prisoners said they were innocent, except for the last in line who said, "Your Majesty, I've robbed. I've killed. And I've wasted everything. And this is why they've sentenced me to life in prison."

When the king heard this prisoner, he turned to him and said, "Even if you've been a great criminal, I want you to get away from the rest of these gentlemen, who are all innocent and should not associate with you because you'll be the ruin of them."

So the king took him and set him free, and this was how the truth was rewarded.

*Told by Giovanni Patuano in Palermo.*

## 205. THE BEAUTY OF ICARA

Among the tales that have been told many times there's one story that took place in ancient Carini, and it's about a young woman who was as beautiful as the sun, with skin as white as milk and lips as red as blood, and she was called the Beauty of Icara. What do you think happened to her? Well, it so happened one time that an Eastern Emperor came to Sicily with a huge army, and he declared war against the king and won. Afterward he sacked the cities and set them afire without pity. He also had all the old people

and the men decapitated, while he took all the women and children prisoners. Among the prisoners was the Beauty of Icara.

Oh almighty God! She was so beautiful! They took her immediately to the emperor, and when the emperor saw her, he was dazzled by her.

"Nothing doing," he said. "She will not be a slave. I want to have her for my wife."

Since she was a prisoner, he ordered her to be untied. Then he took her and brought her to his realm in the East where he made her Empress. In this part of the East there were nine other emperors who were less powerful than this emperor, and they were the subjects of this emperor. Every year they had to pay a large tribute to him. When they came and saw the magnificent Beauty, they fell at her feet with their crowns.

"Your Majesty," they said. "You are so beautiful, that we want to be your slaves and serve you. All you have to do is command us, and we shall do as you wish as will our people."

All of these emperors offered her their crowns. From this you can see just how powerful the incomparable beauty of the Sicilians can be. Indeed, the Beauty of Icara could not be matched, and the fame of her beauty lasted and left everyone speechless.

She lived happy and content

And we, poor beggars, don't have a cent.

*Told by the young Giuseppa Giambrone to Salvatore Salomone-Marino.*

## 206. MOHAMMED

**T**his story has been told, gentlemen, time and again back when there was a meeting of the devils in hell. Well, some of them began saying, "Just look! Everyone is running to the Messiah, and we're not getting many souls nowadays. What are we going to do?"

"Nothing," said Farfareddu (one of the devils). "Leave it to me. There's a solution to our problems."

"What do you mean?"

"Mohammed's up there in the world, and he's fully capable of helping us and won't cause us any difficulty. If Lucifer wants, he can call him and then send him back into the world. Mohammed can think of many things because he's got a smart mind. But he can only do this if he returns here and joins us and has all the power that we have."

“Good, good,” the devils said. “We like this plan. We agree that he should join us.”

And this is what they did. Mohammed went to the world, and with the help of some diabolical art he could tell people what to do and what not to do. Enough said. To be brief, he did everything against the laws of God and set up his own law which was called the law of Mohammed. Then he began to gather souls around him to be sent to hell. When it seemed to him that he had truly gathered an abundant amount of souls, what did he do? He let his notorious ministers do their work always with diabolical tricks and art, and he went away with his brother Farfareddu and with Lucifer to be martyred.

They put his body in an iron coffin in a pagan church. This iron coffin was lifted up high and kept there by the power of a lodestone set up by the devils so that nobody could ever touch it.

Whoever told this tale and whoever had it told  
Won't die a bad death whenever he gets old.

*Told by Giuseppa Giambrone to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borsetto.*

## 207. THE EVIL KING GUGLIELMO

**T**he evil King Guglielmo had all the money of Sicily withdrawn from commerce until nothing was left. Thereafter, he had money minted in leather. To make sure that nobody had gold or silver, he ordered a large horse to be offered for sale in the middle of the piazza. Now this news reached the ears of the son of a prince, who was fond of horseback riding, and he remembered that, when his father had died and had been placed into his tomb, they had put a gold coin in his mouth. Well, he got the coin and went to buy the horse. The evil King Guglielmo heard about the prince who had bought the horse and said, “Well there’s still some money around. I want this prince to be brought here, and we’ll see if he has more money.”

The prince came and said, “I want to tell you the truth. I got this coin from the mouth of my dead father in his tomb.”

And this is how the evil King Guglielmo tormented the people of Sicily.  
*Told by Antonio Loria nicknamed Bonchiaro in Salaparuta.*

## 208. GUGLIELMO THE GOOD

Once upon a time there was a king whose realm was in the northern part of Sicily. This king was called Guglielmo the Good because he was kind to everyone, had a heart as big as gold, and nobody complained about him or even raised a finger. Suffice to say, he was the one who stopped the circulation of leather money that Guglielmo the Bad had started, because he loved the people so much. So, since Guglielmo the Good was so virtuous and a devout follower of the Madonna, she decided to perform a miracle that she had never done for anyone. And, what do you think she did?

Well, one day when the king was out hunting in Monreale, she made him so drowsy that he fell asleep beneath a Carob tree. While he was sleeping, he dreamed about the Madonna who said to him, "Beneath the place you're sleeping, you'll see a great treasure, so large that you can't count all the money, and it's been saved for you. And do you know what you are to do with it? You are to build me a temple because I need one ever since Christianity has been slighted and grown smaller."

After the Madonna said all this, she disappeared. Guglielmo the Good awoke, and his eyes were still dazzled by the extreme beauty and the splendor of the beautiful Virgin Mother. Immediately he called the masons and the diggers, and he ordered them to excavate the roots of the Carob tree. While they were making a hole, they found such a huge mass of gold coins that the king himself stared with his mouth wide open.

"On this spot," he said, "we shall build the throne that the great Mother of God desires!"

Once the word of a king is given, it must be followed immediately. He called goldsmiths and master builders from all over the world, and they built the temple of the Madonna right at Monreale. It was made of gold and precious stones that were still there, and it was beautiful, worthy of the Madonna. Guglielmo the Good continued to do his good deeds, thanks to the Madonna, and after his death he enjoyed a saintly peace like all true Christians.—And this is the tale of the King Guglielmo the Good.

*Told by Francesca Leto to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 209. FREDERICK THE EMPEROR

I'd like you to know, gentleman, that in the olden days there was an Emperor of Sicily, and he was called Frederick the Emperor, an ugly man, always with a pout on his face and red eyes like a tiger. This emperor wanted the people always to be under his iron rule, and without ever drawing a breath, he continually imposed his tyranny. Well, how could they act? It's widely known that the Sicilians are easily aroused, and they do what they think when their tempers flare. So, what was the emperor to do in this regard?

Since he was so powerful, he began abusing them, and much blood was spilled. Among other things he took delight like a barbarian by having many people who appeared before him buried alive face down in silence. But the day of reckoning arrived and the devil himself appeared and took him to Hell. And this was how the abuses and cruelty of the Emperor Frederick came to an end.

*Told by the peasant Giuseppe Polizzi to Salvatore Salomone-Marino at Borgetto.*

## 210. THE SICILIAN VESPERS

There's a story told time and again that the French used to be in Sicily, and they were so oppressive that nobody could put up with them any longer. Besides other terrible things, they made a law that any Sicilian woman who got married was not allowed to sleep with her husband until she had first slept with a Frenchman. We can assume that, if she was wealthy, she slept with a captain; if she was from the middle class, she slept with a sergeant or maybe a corporal; and if she was poor, she slept with an enlisted man. Should we have put up with such things? Not on your life! And it was made even worse by the fact that these Frenchmen took over all our possessions. They would enter and leave Sicilian homes as if they were their own, and they robbed us of our silver and gold and anything else they liked—and they did all this while molesting any man's wife they wanted.

Well, there happened to be a valiant and courageous man who absolutely detested these Frenchmen. His name was Giuanni Pròcita, and they had forced him to leave Sicily. But do you know what he did? When he heard about all the crimes the French were committing in Sicily, he put on a monk's



robe, grew a beard, and came back. He then pretended to be crazy, and wandered all through the towns of the island murmuring things in the ear of every man he encountered. If the man was a Sicilian, he would say, "Listen, we're going to kill all the Frenchmen at the Vespers in March." If it was a Frenchman, he would just babble silly sayings and rhymes to make them laugh. And they, poor fools, with no inkling that he was planning their death, would laugh at him and say, "Oh, that poor madman!"

When March arrived and it was the hour of the Vespers, the people in Palermo, where the plot had been hatched, began their uprising. The Frenchmen were indulging in their usual arrogant behavior when they heard the cries: "Let's get them! Death to the French!" And the Sicilians cut the throats of every single Frenchman they could find. Then they went out to all the villages and fields, and they ordered anyone they met to say "ciceri!"<sup>250</sup> If the answer came back "ciceri," they would say, "You can go safely, you're one of us." But if the answer came back "chicheri," they said, "You damned Frenchman! You criminal!" and they would kill him without mercy. You see, the French cannot say "ciceri." Instead, they say "chicheri." And so the Sicilians were able to recognize who was French<sup>251</sup> and were able to rid us of that accursed race.

What they did next was to collect all the severed genitals of the murdered Frenchmen, salt them, and pack them in tuna barrels. Then they sent a shipload to France. The Frenchmen deserved all this and more, because their tyrannical behavior hadn't bothered them in the least. Giuanni Pròcita was made Commander-in-Chief, and the French never dared to set foot on our land again. That's how scared of us they were. And they remain scared to this day, because every year they take a map with Sicily printed on it, and at the hour of the Vespers in March they burn it in a public square. By this act they intend to show that, if they came again to our island and could get control of it, they would burn it in just that way. But that will never happen, because the Sicilians will always be against the French due to all the evils they committed here, and no Frenchman will ever set foot here again because they would all die if they did.

And this is the story of the Sicilian Vespers, caused by the tyranny of the French.

*Collected from Vincenzo Rappa by Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

<sup>250</sup> Chickpeas.

<sup>251</sup> The point being made is that the French language lacks the sound used by Italian for "ci" and "ce" (pronounced like English "chi" and "che"), and so a Frenchman has to substitute a "k" sound, which is spelled "chi" and "che" in Italian.

## 211. THE SLAUGHTER OF THE FRENCH AT TRAPANI

**T**he French were in Sicily, and they instituted the following practice for every Sicilian who got married. If it was me, for example, and I am a porter, my wife would have to sleep with a soldier the first night. If it was a gentleman, the wife would have to sleep with a lieutenant, and so forth, throughout all the populace. Now there happened to be a master shoemaker whose daughter they wanted to use in this way. So what he did was to call everyone together, make a plan, and circulate throughout Sicily, speaking with all the shoemakers of the island.

Well, in Trapani there happened to be four shoemakers, who made a plan amongst themselves. All four of them went to the cliff of Turrigni, near the Rock of the Bad Council,<sup>252</sup> where they huddled together away from everyone else, and here is the plan they came up with. “When it is vespers at the church of San Lorenzo, let’s be ready. As the people exit from the church, we’ll ask each one to say ‘cicira.’ Whoever says ‘chicara’ (since the French can’t pronounce ‘cicira’) gets his head cut off.”

The event happened just as these four men had proposed. If someone said “chicara,” then off came his head!

Once they had killed the French, they cut off their “things” and sent them back to France accompanied by ten deaf-mutes and one man who could speak, with the message: “Above, barrels of tuna, below, balls and testicles.”<sup>253</sup>

When this shipment arrived and the French saw these things, they said “Oh, by the great Devil! How do they dare insult our country in this manner? By Mohammed,<sup>254</sup> they’ve cut off France’s testicles! They’ll pay for this. From now on, every year when Sicily’s holiday comes in August, we’ll make an image of the island and light a fire beneath it.”

And so every year the French burn Sicily, because they are so angry that Sicily insulted them in this way. But no one can match a Sicilian in courage and valor.

*Told to Pitrè by Nicasio Catanzaro (nicknamed Baddazza) in Trapani.*

<sup>252</sup> See the following tale 212, which explains the reason for this name.

<sup>253</sup> *Supra surra, cu li balliri, e sutta, bācari e buttuna*. The second phrase literally says “jugs and buttons,” but the Sicilian words *bācari* and *buttuna* can metaphorically suggest testicles, and we have translated accordingly.

<sup>254</sup> This is the unusual word *Maumettumilia*, a strange and untranslatable compound based on “Mohammed.” It must have been intended to characterize the French as no better than heathens, following upon having them swear “by the great Devil.”

## 212. THE ROCK OF THE BAD COUNCIL

**G**ood gentlemen, they say that this is the rock where Pròcita came to conspire with his barons for the Sicilian Vespers. They went to bathe in the sea, where they could discuss their plans freely with no one overhearing them. The plans eventually succeeded, and all the French were killed. And because this was the place where they planned the murder of the French, it is called The Rock of Bad Council.

*Collected from a townsman in Trapani by Salvatore Salomone-Marino.*

## 213. THE GALLIC TOMB

**W**hen the Sicilians carried out the slaughter of the French soldiers, they did it here in Mineo as well. They had no wish to bury the dead Frenchmen in holy ground, so they dug a big ditch on the plain of Sant' Agostino, and there they dumped all the bodies indiscriminately, and to add to the insult, everyone threw a stone on top of the bodies. This event led to the naming of the incline which is called "The Gallic Tomb."

*Collected by Luigi Capuana in Mineo.*

## 214. BEAUTIFUL ANGIOLINA<sup>255</sup>

**P**eople say that during the war of the Vespers, Ruggiero Loria was in his castle together with his wife and family. Among them was his daughter Angiolina, a young woman of extraordinary beauty. A dauphin of France had fallen in love with this maiden, and she had been promised to him in marriage. However, when the Vespers uprising occurred, he fled to France and promised his fiancée that he would return and claim her within six months. The sign of his imminent return would be the lighting of three fires on the tower of Mt. Rotondo in nearby Francavilla.

The fact is, however, that he returned in the disguise of a madman, and

<sup>255</sup> This tale is unusual in being in Italian and not Sicilian, and its style is more formal than the customary oral narrative style. See further comments in the endnote.

exactly at the time when they were celebrating the festival of San Lorenzo. Loria himself had gone to the festival, surrounded by his knights, and he met the disguised dauphin, who played the role of a madman so skilfully that he fooled the great captain. The captain asked him why he had come to Castiglione, and the dauphin's answer was that he had wounded a stag in this region and spent six months pursuing it without success, and now he was bent on finding it at any cost. Loria and his court laughed at this story.

When Loria returned to his castle a solemn banquet was held, and the story was told of the encounter with the madman. But to Angiolina this story was precious, because she understood full well that she herself was the stag that her fiancé had alluded to.

Now Angiolina had a daughter named Franca,<sup>256</sup> who shared all her secrets, and she told her about the dauphin's return, adding, "Franca, go and see if the three fires are lit on the tower of Mt. Rotondo."<sup>257</sup> The child went and just before midnight spotted the three agreed-upon signal fires, as well as three other answering fires from the highest point of the castle called Sulicchiata. Not long after, the dauphin arrived in Castiglione with four of his trusty men. He sent a signal to Angiolina, and she and her daughter climbed down a silken ladder from the second oval window supported by a small column in the middle of the esplanade. From there, under the dauphin's protection, they crossed Francavilla Gagi and got on a swift boat that was ready for them at Schiso, from which point they took to the sea.

The next morning Ruggiero Loria missed seeing his daughter who usually ran to give him an embrace at the beginning of the day, and so he ordered her to be awakened. When he heard no reply and nothing but silence from her room, he ran there himself, only to find an empty nest. Both she and the child were gone and a silken ladder hung from their window. Now he fully realized his disgrace, which was confirmed by the following verses he found, which Angiolina had written and left on the kneeling-stool at her bedside:

If you wish to find your daughter Angioline,  
Go over to France and you'll find she's the Queen.<sup>258</sup>

*Collected from an unknown source by Lionardo Vigo in Castiglione-Etneo.*

256 This puzzling detail is not explained in the story, which treats Angiolina as if she were an unmarried virgin.

257 This sentence is in Sicilian, not Italian.

258 These verses are in Sicilian, not Italian.

## 215. THE SOCIETY OF THE HOLY PAULS

They say that, in times past, Sicily had a society made up of artisans and humble folk whose purpose was to oversee the rights of fair-minded people and to defend their interests against the arrogant rich and noble classes who controlled all the power and used it to oppress the populace and treat them unfairly. For example, if there was a rich man pestering an honest daughter of the lower classes and the Holy Pauls heard about it, they would let the arrogant fellow know—quietly, behind the scenes—that he'd better behave himself or else. And if he chose not to behave himself, they really would do away with him, and everyone would look the other way. Or if there was, let's say, a Viceroy who was acting arrogantly and condemning people unfairly and sending them to prison with no good reason, the Holy Pauls were sure to know about it, since they had friends and contacts throughout the entire kingdom, and every complaint of the common people came to their attention. Then they would see to it that this Viceroy got what he deserved—two quick blows with a knife, and he was gone from the scene.

You see, they saw to it that our rights were correctly defined and that everything went as it was supposed to—not like things are today—because the Holy Pauls really cared about these matters.

Now, these Holy Pauls existed throughout the entire kingdom, but it was in Palermo that they were most active. They held their meetings in an underground cave alongside San Cosimo, which I believe must still exist, because the street there is called “The Street of the Holy Pauls.” These men had been given that name because they all acted like men of the church. During the daytime, in order to learn all that was going on, they would dress like monks of St. Francis de Paul and remain in church pretending to say the rosary. But at night, they would gather in council to discuss all that they had seen and heard about, and then they would decide on acts of retribution.<sup>259</sup>

It was only a matter of time before the law caught up with them, and they were all arrested. And so, the Holy Pauls came to an end, once and for all.

*Told to Salvatore Salomone-Marino by his servant Francesca Campo in Borgetto*

259 The Sicilian says *urdivavanu li minnitti*, literally, “they would order the vendettas.”

## 216. THE DEVILS OF THE ZISA

**D**ou should know that in Palermo there is a great palace that is built like a castle and is called the Zisa. Well, this palace has an entryway made of gold and is elegantly painted, and in the middle there is a marble fountain. This fountain flows with water so fresh and clean that it delights the heart, and in the midst of the water you can see pieces of silver and gold tossing about.

Now, there is an enchantment in the Zisa palace, connected with a bank of gold coins that is kept there, the biggest bank of gold that ever existed (except for the bank of Ddisisa<sup>260</sup>). This gold is under a spell cast by devils, who don't want Christian folk to make off with it. You good gentlemen should know that this palace was built in pagan times, and they assembled all the Emperor's treasures there. In the arch of the Zisa's beautiful entryway they painted a host of devils, and people who go there to look at them on the Day of the Annunciation can see them move their tails and twist their mouths. And you can never trust that you've counted these devils accurately. This is to show that you can never count the gold coins either, because they are too numerous and remain under a spell, so that nobody can ever remove them.

But one day the solution to removing the coins will surely be found, and on that day all the poverty of Palermo will be eliminated.

*Collected from Ninfa Lobaido by Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 217. THE JUDGES' SLOPE

**G**ood gentlemen, there was once a prince who did not have any heirs. Now, in those days, princes kept abbots as instructors for their sons. So this prince took a wife, and as soon as he saw she was pregnant, he found an abbot to serve as teacher to the son who was going to be born. This was an old abbot who had been with the family since the time of the prince's father. He knew everything about the family, including all their deeds and titles, and was fully informed in such matters.

Well, the princess gave birth to a baby boy, but the poor woman died in childbirth. And then the prince himself died from overwhelming grief. When

<sup>260</sup> See tale 230.

the abbot learned of this, he dismissed the wet-nurse and handed the baby over for nursing to a miller's wife who worked as a gardener. For the first few months, the abbot paid this woman a stipend, but then he gave her no further thought, and that was the end of it. So the boy grew up quite ignorant of his fortune and was on his way to becoming a gardener.

Now, this woman had another son, and the two boys were always coming to blows. One day, the gardener's son said to the youth, "How can you possibly be my brother? No, you certainly had a different mother. Why don't you go look for your mother in Palermo?"

Since the young fellow had often heard his mother say similar things, he decided he would go to Palermo. When he arrived there, he ended up at the end of Via dei Chiavettieri, or Street of the Locksmiths. There happened to be a master locksmith living there, and the youth, who by now was hungry, went in and offered to work as the man's assistant in exchange for lodging. The locksmith agreed, gave him a meal, and the youth began working there.

As time passed, the locksmith and his wife grew very fond of this young fellow, and one day they asked him, "Who are your parents?"

"How should I know?" he replied. "What I've heard is that I'm the son of the Prince of Cattolica,<sup>261</sup> my mother died giving birth to me, and an abbot was responsible for me and my possessions."

Upon hearing this, the locksmith's wife felt a great compassion for this young man, who began as the son of a prince and was reduced to doing menial labor. And so she said to her husband, "Why don't we give this young fellow an education? He does, after all, come from people of quality." And so they had him learn how to read and write.

Eventually the day arrived when this young man legally came of age, and he went before the city registrar. There his true lineage was fully revealed, and he obtained the documents that allowed him to go to court and argue that he, and not the abbot, was the true heir to his father's estate. (For he was no longer a boy now, but a handsome young man.) So he and the abbot began to litigate, but the abbot sent vast sums of money to the judges and the chief magistrate, and after two years the case was decided in favor of the abbot. The young man filed an appeal, and again the money flowed like water, and although the young man's claims were valid, it was the abbot's money that carried the day.

When the young locksmith saw that he would never obtain justice here, he decided to embark for Spain. When he arrived there, he went to the royal

261 The Prince of Cattolica was one of the chief nobles of Palermo, according to Pitre's note.

court and sought an audience with the king. Once he was before the king, he said, "I am grateful to your Majesty," and showed him all his court documents. The king read them and at once took up pen and ink and wrote a letter. "Take this," he said, "go back to Sicily, and everything will turn out well for you."

So the young locksmith returned to Sicily with this letter and re-opened his case. But once again the judges decided against his claim. Seeing himself rebuffed a second time, he returned to Spain and went to the king.

"Your majesty, they wouldn't pay any attention to your letter, and now I've used up all my resources."

Well, you can imagine the king's anger at hearing this! What he did was to have an abbot's habit made for him—a very plain one, with no adornments—and they went together to Palermo. He stayed at the locksmith's house, and the young locksmith once again went to court, accompanied this time by the new abbot.

Now, once the legal wrangling was under way, one of the judges made an outrageous remark, and the king dressed as an abbot politely asked him, "Why don't you interpret the law correctly?"

"Mind your own business, you bowlegged abbot!"<sup>262</sup> the judge replied, and was about to hurl his inkwell at him.

Well, that was the last straw! The disguised king lifted up his robe and revealed the royal fleece, and all those judges nearly dropped dead on the spot!

"You pack of thieving jurists," he exclaimed, "who sell justice for cash! Quickly now, I want these judges tied to horses' tails and dragged through the entire city!"

And so these judges were seized, and their legs were cut off. Their skin was used to make four armchairs, which jurists now sit in when they are hearing cases for capital punishment. Finally, their bodies were attached to horses' tails and dragged through all the streets of Palermo.

And so the old abbot lost his case, and the young man became a prince, and he married the daughter of the old master locksmith. Then he had a statue made of the King of Spain, which now stands facing President Airolidi's house<sup>263</sup> on the Vanedda di li Agunizzanti (Sufferers' Lane). The little alley has

262 We have used "bowlegged abbot" to render *cu l'anchi stuccati*, literally "with crooked haunches." Pitre's note informs us that this is an allusion to an insult commonly directed at choirboys: *Patri abbati—cu l'anchi stuccati, S'un vi nni jiti—vi pigghiu a pitrati!* "Father abbot, with crooked haunches, if you don't go away, I'll pelt you with stones!"

263 This refers to Monsignor Alfonso Airolidi, Archbishop of Ericele in 1786, who was Judge of the Apostolic Delegation and of the Monarchic Tribunal in Sicily.

been named *Lu Curtigghiu di lu Re* (The King's Courtyard), and the street along which the dishonest judges were dragged is now called *La Calata di li Judici* (The Judges' Slope).<sup>264</sup>

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 218. THE GAMBLER'S STONE

**I**nside the Church of St. Agatuzza<sup>265</sup> there is a statue of the Madonna and child which is not easy to look at. She has a scar right here, above her nose, and the infant Jesus has one too. And here is the story behind it.

Once, a long, long time ago, they say that there was a gambler whose gambling took place near the church. Eventually, he gambled so much that he ended up losing everything he owned. When he realized he was in such a sorry state, he began cursing the sun and the moon and all of creation. And what did this heretic do next? He entered the church, saw the statue of the Virgin, took out his knife, and cursing like a Turk, he stabbed her right in the face. At this first cut, blood spurted from the wound. He delivered a second blow, and again there was blood.

By now, the gambler's hair was standing up straight on end. He ran quickly from the little chapel intending to flee, but within a few steps he was seized and taken to jail. He was soon sentenced to the gallows, and the hanging was to take place directly opposite the Madonna's chapel. But it turned out that there wasn't enough space there to build a gallows, and yet the hanging was officially decreed for that specific location. Well, at this point God himself lent a hand. At the street corner opposite the chapel, a rectangular stone mysteriously rose up from the earth and had exactly the height of a gallows, and they lost no time in carrying out the hanging then and there.

A few days later they cut up the stone and removed it, but it grew back again. They kept trying to cut it up and remove it, but it always grew right back. And so today whoever passes by can see it, still in the same place. And so they've named it "The Gambler's Stone."

*Told by a female porter employed by the Church of St. Agata la Guilla in Palermo.*

<sup>264</sup> There may be a double meaning here, since *calata* also means "lowering" or "fall."

<sup>265</sup> This is the local way of referring to the Church of St. Agata la Guilla, which stood next to the Cathedral.

## 219. THE COURTYARD OF THE SEVEN FAIRIES

**W**ithin the narrow alley that emerges in front of the Monastery of Santa Chiara you'll find the Courtyard of the Seven Fairies. People say that seven enchanted fairies<sup>266</sup> used to come to this courtyard at night, each being more beautiful than the next. They would take away men or women whom they favored and show them marvelous things never seen before: music, balls, banquets, and other such wonders. They say that the fairies also carried them far away over the sea, and let them walk on water without getting their feet wet. They would come and perform such wonders every night, and then the next morning they would vanish, and no one would say a word about it.

So that's how this courtyard came to be known as the Courtyard of the Seven Fairies.

*Told by a woman dressmaker in the Incline of the Savior (Salita del Salvatore) in Palermo.*

## 220. THE CROSS OF SANTA CROCE CHURCH

**I**n the olden days, there was a man who tended cattle, and he noticed that every day one of the oxen knelt down at the very spot where Santa Croce Church now stands. When this happened three times, the herdsman let the fact be known throughout the vicinity.

As a consequence, the people all came there and began digging at that very spot, and they eventually dug up a cross. It is the very one that now stands in Santa Croce Church, bearing an inscription that no one can read.

Long ago the Saracens were here, and they battled against the Christians, in a manner that we re-enact when we perform our *taratata*. They fought over the possession of this cross, and when the Saracens were defeated, the Christians established this church here.<sup>267</sup>

*Told by M. Filippo Martorana to Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

266 Instead of "fairies" (fate) the storyteller uses the Sicilian phrase *donni di fora*, "women from another place," which Pitre defined as "imaginary female spirits who, on certain nights, visit one or another person they wish to confer favors upon, taking them with them and conversing with them."

267 Pitre adds a footnote saying that this small church was located one mile west of the town and had a hermit as its custodian.

## 221. SABBEDDA'S CAVE

**T**hey say that once there were four young girls, each more beautiful than the next, but the loveliest of all was the one called Sabbedda. A young field hand was after her and made improper advances, but she didn't give him the time of day, because she was a good girl.

And so what did this young fellow do? Seeing that Sabbedda would not pay attention to his advances, he lay in wait for her one day outside of town. As she was passing by, he threw himself upon her, but she resisted him. In his anger he stabbed her in the heart and buried her in a nearby cave. And this is why that place is called Sabbedda's Cave.

*Told by Angela Smiraglia in Capaci.*

## 222. VALLEY OF THE WOMAN

**T**hey tell the story that, when Count Ruggiero came to capture our fortress at the top of the Motta Rock, all of the Saracens went up to do battle with him there. The Christians fought them at the place called The Summit of the Flag, where you can still see the hole where they stuck their flag—and this is how it got the name of The Summit of the Flag.

When the Christians were defeating the Saracens, there was a Saracen woman, who was so frightened that she took to her heels in flight. The Christians saw her and went after her. They finally caught up with her near the Valley of the Woman, opposite the old woods.<sup>268</sup> There they killed her, because she would not give them what they wanted. And so that's how the Valley of the Woman got its name.

*Told by the shepherd Filippo Martorana to Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

<sup>268</sup> This was the old Chiudia Woods, of which only the name remained in Pitre's day.

## 223. MOTTA ROCK, SUMMIT OF THE FLAG, AND VALLEY OF THE WOMAN

**B**ack when the Saracens were here, the Christians and Saracens fought many battles. The Christians' stronghold was called the Summit of the Flag, a place where they had made a hole in the rock to hold their flag—and this hole still exists today.

Well, after the Christians of the Summit of the Flag happened to defeat the Saracens of Motta Rock, there were two Saracen leaders and their sister who took flight together, and the Christians chased after them. They had just about caught up with them at the place called Valley of the Woman when the Saracens, to keep their sister from falling into enemy hands, killed her, and then they themselves escaped. And that's why this place is called Valley of the Woman.

*Told by Vincenzo Palermo to Gaetano Di Giovanni at Casteltermini.*

## 224. THE HAUNTED CAVE OF BEAUTIFUL PEAK

**I**n the days when the Saracens were here, they made a huge cave in the district of the mountain Lu Pizzu.<sup>269</sup> Since this cave was the Saracens' main residence, they hid all their most valuable treasures there. People say that all this gold still lies hidden in that cave, but no one can take it because it is guarded by spirits in the form of rams. It is for this reason—both the beauty of the mountain and the treasures that lie hidden there—that they call it Beautiful Peak.

*Told by Vincenzo Palermo to Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

## 225. THE CAPTAIN'S OLIVE TREE

**W**ithin the confines of Borgetto, there is an olive tree called "The Captain," and it has a story.

The old folks who know this tree say that at this very spot,

<sup>269</sup> The word *pizzu* itself means peak, so we have added "mountain" to our translation. Similarly, we have added "haunted" to our translation of the title because it is an important element of the story.

during the night, a coffin appears with a corpse in it, flanked by four lit torches and four men bearing it on their shoulders, and it is evident that they are carrying it to the Church, reciting the *Credo* and all the proper ceremonies for the dead. They say that the dead man is a captain who once was killed on this spot, and that is why it is called "The Captain's Olive."

Another man has told me that he once happened to be passing this Captain's Olive around midnight, and he saw some kind of goatskin flask rolling around on the ground next to the olive tree. In his fright he picked up a stick and began striking at this skin, but he never was able to hit it. He continued on his way to the rock of Purcasi, with the skin following him all the way there. Finally, he gave it two more whacks with the stick and suddenly it vanished before his eyes, leaving no trace behind.

*Told by Vincenzo Rappa at Borgetto.*

## 226. MARABEDDA PEAK

Once there were two brothers whose name was Marabeddi, and they went out to gather useful plants. When they were at the top of a mountain, they fell to quarrelling, and one brother struck the other and knocked him headfirst off the mountain peak. Immediately he fled, but justice caught up with him, and he was condemned to the punishment he deserved. And from that time on, the mountain has been called Marabedda Peak.

*Told by Vincenzo Rappa in Borgetto.*

## 227. THE MOUNTAIN OF THE COUNTRY FAIR

This Mountain of the Country Fair is located above the feudo, or feudal fief, of Guastella.

Once there was an animal herder who was looking after his charge, when he heard all kinds of sounds as if some kind of festival was taking place: music, singing and dancing, the sounds of horses taking off at a racing course, and he even heard the cries of vendors selling all sorts of caramels and sweets. So, he thought it would be well worth going up the mountain to take in the whole spectacle.


He was dismayed, however, as he drew near, because he saw a host of good things to buy, but he didn't have one cent in his pockets. Then one of the vendors said to him, "Look in your pockets and you'll find some coins."

So he looked, and he found five small coins and bought five oranges. With the oranges in his pockets, he ran back to his employer and told him the whole story, how he came upon this festival and had no money and yet found five coins in his pocket and bought five oranges. Now this employer of his was a mean-spirited man, and he made him sell him the five oranges for only a penny apiece. Then he gave him a little more money to go back and buy all the remaining oranges. But when he went back up the mountain, he couldn't find any music, songs, fruit, or anything. The fact was that he had broken the magic spell.

Now every year, on the twenty-third of June, people hear this music and all the sounds of a great country fair, and everything that they sell there is made of gold.<sup>270</sup> But these sounds can only be heard by someone who knows nothing about it in advance, someone who comes to the place as "virgin soil," so to speak. If a person already knows about it, then he will hear no sounds at all.

*Told by Vincenzo Rappa in Borgetto.*

## 228. THE SACKS OF GOLD ON THE MOUNTAIN

n another slope of the Mountain of the Country Fair, you'll find a pair of sacks—the kind of sacks made in Prizzi<sup>271</sup>—and they are filled with gold coins. But these sacks are under a spell. In order to reach them, you have to walk for three long miles, two of them on level ground and the third mile climbing up the mountain. You must carry a full glass of water and bring it all the way to where the sacks are located without spilling a single drop. If you succeed, you'll be able to cash in on this golden treasure.

But could a person ever be found who could carry this full glass of water all the way there without spilling a drop?

*Told by Vincenzo Rappa in Borgetto.*

270 This allows us to infer that the oranges were made of gold, and that is why the greedy employer was eager to purchase them all.

271 Pitre's note explains that there was a distinctive kind of plush sack made in Prizzi.

## 229. THREE BROTHERS PEAK

**T**hree Brothers Peak is located at Pratti, a fief of Borgetto, and this is its story.

Once three brothers set out to gather soup greens, each with a sack on his back and a knife in his hand. They had only one piece of bread between them and began quarrelling over who would get to eat first. They grew angrier and angrier with one other until finally they began cursing. At this point the Lord intervened and turned them into three masses of rock, each having a sack on its back and a knife in its hand. If you look at them close up, you can make out their original shapes before they became stone, one of them being bigger, the second smaller, and the third the smallest of all. *Told by Vincenzo Rappa in Borgetto.*

230. THE BANK OF DDISISA<sup>272</sup>

**T**he bank of Ddisisa is a treasure that can be found in the caves in the region of Ddisisa. According to the ancient tales there was an enormous amount of gold and silver coins there, and whoever found the money could never find a way out of the caves. In our times certain people wanted to prove they could find a way out, and they took the gold coins, but they never could find a way out as long as they had the money. Once they had the flimsy idea of sticking a coin in a crumb of bread, and they forced a dog to swallow it, but this dog could not find its way out. Only after the dog had done its duty and the coin was excreted could it find a way out.

According to the ancient tales, the three Saints of Turrisi, who are the three heads of the realm, must be placated to carry away the treasury of the great bank of Ddisisa. To appease the saints, one has to fetch a white mare, kill it, and take out its insides and fry them. Once they are fried, they are to be offered to the three Saints of Turrisi in bunches to eat, and afterward, the treasures can be taken out. There are three banks: Rocca d'Antedda, Ddisisa,

<sup>272</sup> Ddisisa is a hill in Sicily that is covered with the ruins of an Arab castle. In the bosom of the hill there are subterranean caves.

and the Grutta di Re Cuccu.<sup>273</sup> The Turkish king always asks: “Have the treasures been taken from these three banks?”

“No.” is the answer.

“Well then, Sicily is still poor.”

*Told to Pitrè by Vincenzo Rappa in Borgetto.*

## 231. THE ROCK OF ANTEDDA

People say that there is a cave in the Rock of Antedda, and in the cave there is a large amount of coins. To get the coins, hundreds have entered, but nobody has left with the money. It costs blood to get out of the cave with the coins. If one leaves the coins, then one can find the exit. Some have tried to bring dogs and bread with them. They stuck some coins in the middle of the bread and gave it to the dogs to eat. But the dogs could only leave if they disposed of the money that they swallowed.

There are three treasures in Sicily: Rocca d’Antedda, Munti di Rosa, and Bancu di Ddisisa. The Sultan of Turkey always asked whether someone was able to get the treasures, and when he heard that nobody could do it, he would say, “Sicily is poor!”

*Told to Pitrè by Carlo Loria with the nickname Bònchiaro in Salaparuta.*

## 232. THE MOUNTAIN OF SAINT CUONU

Saint Cuonu of Polizzi is a mountain of the Madunii, and it was given this name because inside it has the statute of Raccuonu<sup>274</sup> with his mace, and this statue guards a treasure. This mountain has a wooden door completely covered with ivory, and according to ancient lore, it opens every seven years on Holy Thursday and remains open as long as the Passion lasts at the Cathedral of Polizzi.

At the moment that the door is supposed to open, a thick fog descends and covers the entire mountain and surroundings so that everyone becomes

<sup>273</sup> This is a cave in a hill between Partinico and Siciara.

<sup>274</sup> Pitrè suggests that the name is perhaps Re Conu, or King Conu. According to popular tradition, it is a marble statue at the bottom of this mountain.

frightened by the terrible darkness, and the people can't determine where they are.

Inside this mountain there are dark subterranean rooms filled with coins. Whoever is brave enough can descend to gather the money, but he has to pay attention to the time of seven years. Besides this, he has to be right at the door when it opens and quick enough to snatch the mace from Raccuonu's hand so that the door doesn't close and he doesn't die inside. If the man doesn't manage to take away Raccuonu's mace, he will certainly be locked into the rooms with the money by the end of the Passion.

It is said that this treasure was placed there by ancient kings, and to make sure that nobody would steal it, they placed the statue of Raccuonu to guard it because they thought that just the awesome presence of the statue, looking like it was about to deliver blows with its mace, would be enough to scare away people.

In the meantime this mountain has become enchanted, and this is why, if someone arrives to carry out the treasure, he has to leave a token to see whether the treasure will be his. And this way, without having to knock at the door, Raccuonu, who knows everything, can open the door and let the man enter and carry away the treasure. But the opposite can happen, for whoever arrives at the mountain and finds the token already there, the door will not open, and he must not resist because it is a certain sign that the fortune is not his but someone else's.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialonga at Polizzi-Generosa.*

### 233. THE ROCK OF PIZZIDDU

**I**n the vicinity of Cammarata there is the Rock of Pizziddu which is a kind of mountain covered with prickly pears and pistachio trees. This is a rich mountain: there are so many treasures that one day a man from the eastern part of Greece, who had heard about the treasures, came to get them. He made friends with a man from Cammarata and said to him, "Are you brave enough to want to make yourself rich?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Come with me," the Greek said, and they went to Pizziddu. He took a magic book and a black candle with him. Once they were there, he began to read, and soon a door opened, and they found a treasure inside. They fetched the money and returned home. Then the sorcerer said to him, "Now, I want you to return there alone. If you don't, I'll take your life."

The man from Cammarata enjoyed the taste of the money, and he returned to the rock and collected what was left of the melted-down black candle and made a little candle out of it, said the magic words, and the door of Pizziddu opened. The man was under a magic spell so that he didn't notice that the candle was melting down. As he was carrying two sacks of gold, the candle went out, and it became dark. The rock closed, and he remained inside. He was not able to get out, and he furiously chewed on his slipper.

In our times if one wants to get this treasure of Pizziddu, it's necessary to have a race horse and to ride across the crest of the rock up to the peak itself. Then the magic spell will be lifted, and we'll all be rich. However, this horse has never been found, and we are all fools.

*Told by Pietro La Piana at Cammarata.*

## 234. THE LITTLE CHURCH OF OUR SAVIOR

**I**n the vicinity of the mountains of Madunii, there is another mountain which is called Saint Cuonu. This mountain opens every seven years, and it's at the exact hour of the Passion, the morning of Good Friday. In this mountain there's a treasure, and one time a peasant wanted to get it, and he went at the right hour, right before the Passion was to be held in the village. When he arrived, he found the door open and realized that the hour had arrived for him to become rich. He entered, and since he knew exactly what to do, he immediately took the mace out of Saint Cuonu's hand—which the Saint allows only during the time of the passion—and set it on the ground. In the distance he heard a great deal of noise; people were clanging chains. So he took the money and carried it to the sacks that he had outside where the mules were waiting.

After he carried the money to the mules, he paid his respects to Saint Cuonu, took the reins of the mules, and headed toward his home in the direction of the village. As he touched his head, he realized that he was missing his beret. Indeed, he had taken it off out of reverence for Saint Cuonu when he had paid his respects.

Now the peasant didn't want to lose his beret. So he turned around, went back to the opening of the mountain, left the sacks outside, and went into the cave to search for his beret. After he took it, he searched for the door, but he couldn't find it anymore because Saint Cuonu had just closed it as the Passion at the church had come to an end.


The peasant believed that was the reason and realized that he was not only

lost but also that he could not get out and would die. The poor man began praying out of desperation and promised the Lord that if he were set free and would be allowed to leave, he would build a church and have it called the Little Church of Our Savior. Then the poor man, by the grace of God, searched his pocket and found an iron knife. He took the knife and cut the wall to see if he could find a way to escape. As he began scraping the wall with his knife, the wall gradually gave way until he was able to dig a hole large enough for him to crawl through it, and he made his way out, giving thanks to the Lord the entire time.

He found all the money he had taken exactly where he had left it, and he packed all of it on his mules and returned to the village. Of course, he was in a happy mood, and a few days later he carried out his promise and had the Little Church of our Savior built right in the village.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo at Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 235. THE STONE OF THE SEVEN MULES

nce there was a muleteer who was leading seven mules loaded with fruit. When he reached the mountains of Pulizzi, he came across a hermit of the Church of the Pietà who asked for alms. Since the muleteer did not believe in God or in saints, he refused and instead began to maltreat the hermit. Consequently, the good servant of God looked to heaven and asked for the Lord's protection. Well, what did you think the Lord did? He let a piece of the mountain roll down from the peak and crush the muleteer along with his seven mules. After time passed, some people who had come to work in a nearby garden saw the muleteer return to life with his seven mules and begin to ride astride one of the mules. Then they watched as he tried to lift his hands to gather the fruit that was hanging there. The stone that had fallen was large, and from then on everyone called it *The Stone of the Seven Mules*.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo at Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 236. THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY ANNUNCIATION

There was once a gentlemen in our country, and he was quite rich, but also a vicious rogue. After he had gone through his youthful days, the vices of this man decreased, and after he had caused many daughters of mothers to weep, he finally became old, and with old age he went to mass.

When he realized that the years had passed him by, he began to think about the other world and started saying his rosary and the paternoster. He went to monks and holy people and attended mass, gave alms, and helped people when he saw that they could do nothing more with their lives. Finally, he built a church and added a kind of monastery, and he dedicated the church to the Holy Mother of the Annunciation.

In the meantime Old Lady Death came, and it was good night for him! But it was not long after his death that the people, who lived nearby, began seeing a man during the summer in a gully a little bit below this church where the ground deepens and where even the crows wouldn't perch. This man would walk in the midst of the heat above the precipice and was wrapped in a cloak up to the tip of his nose and seemed like a dark shadow. He never sat down and never got tired, but always kept moving.

This evil shadow could be seen at night and in various forms. Once, when there were rainy and windy storms filled with lightning and thunder, the water came down in buckets, and the shadow appeared to some poor peasant who happened to be out walking in the bad weather right at that moment. The shadow rode a horse blacker than pitch, and his hair was down over his forehead. He was dressed completely in red, a creature of pure scarlet, and he dashed with great speed on the horse that spouted fire, smoke, and sparks from its mouth.

Sometimes the shadow would appear as a large billy goat with twisted horns ten feet long and other times like a panting dog waiting for food. In short, he constantly found all kinds of ways to scare the people, and they began to believe that it was the gentleman who had built the church. So, whenever they passed it, they always made the sign of the cross and asked the Madonna of the Annunciation to take care of them and not let them see the evil shadow.

*Collected by Salvatore Amendola at Lipari and sent to Pitrè by Professor Letterio Lizio Bruno.*

## 237. THE TOWER OF SAINT BRANCATU

At Polizzi there is a tower right near the Church of Saint Brancatu. Inside this tower there are ghosts because it's said that they've experienced many things. This is why nobody entered the tower and nobody dared to approach from the outside.

Now, once a group of young boys gathered nearby, and they began talking among themselves and asking who was the bravest of all. Among them was one boy who said that he was better than a hundred of them because he had already proven his great courage many times.

"All right," the others said, "since you feel so brave, we'll all make a bet with money to see who's brave enough to enter the tower of Saint Brancatu, and whoever wins gets the money."

"All right, I'm ready, and I'll be the first one to try," announced the boy who said that he was the bravest of all. "But first let's put down our money for the bet. Each one is to put up twelve tari."

"All right," the others responded. "But how are we to know whether you really enter the tower?"

So they all thought of a signal, and they agreed that whoever entered was to signal the others by hitting a nail into the wall of the tower. The boy agreed and was given a large nail to hit into the wall as proof. So he said goodbye and went to the tower. Once he was there, he summoned his courage, climbed the stairs, and went inside the tower. It was late, and he was scared to be inside the tower. Before the boy went to hit the nail into the wall, he looked all around him to see if someone had come to take his life. The shadows of the night had already begun to darken his imagination, but he didn't want to leave without doing anything because that would have caused him to lose the bet and the money. He was eager to get the job done and get out of there as fast as he could. So he took the nail with his left hand and picked up a rock to hit the nail with his right. Then he placed the nail on the spot where he was going to hit it, but as he vigorously knocked the nail into the wall, he caught the tip of his coat without realizing it and became attached to the wall. After he finished, it seemed that one hundred years had passed, but imagine how frightened he became when he felt his coat caught by something! He immediately thought that the ghosts were holding the coat so that he would not be able to get away and they would kill him. He lost all his courage and dropped down dead out of fright right on that spot.

So now let's turn back to his friends who were waiting for his return and didn't see him appear. They thought he was playing a joke on them to show

his courage and that he was not afraid to stay inside. However, after two days, they realized that he had not returned home. Once his parents became aware of this, they all ran to see if he was in the tower. When they went inside, they found him spread on the ground with the tip of the coat nailed into the wall. In the end they realized what had caused his death.

This is the story about the Tower of Saint Brancatu.

*Collected at Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 238. THE PEAK<sup>275</sup>

**T**he Peak is a mountain near Capaci. At one time the Turks had been there and had left a treasure box filled with gold coins. The treasure can only be redeemed if someone dies there. For example, if someone kills someone else, the treasure will be redeemed. It's written in stone on the treasure box that whoever has killed someone else can take this treasure.

It is on top of this mountain that the sheep and cows are taken to graze. One time a young boy was frightened when a man appeared dressed like a lay brother and approached him. The boy fled, and the man followed him. The young boy reached home, and the man climbed on top of a large rock. Then the boy recounted that the man changed himself first into a dog, then a crow, and finally he disappeared. And he said that the man had called him to come and dance with him, and if the boy had gone with him, perhaps he would have redeemed the treasure.

*Told by Angela Smiraglia at Capaci.*

## 239. THE BASIN OF THE CROWS

**T**he basin is a small watering pool where the crows come to live, and many other kinds of birds because, when it rains, the basin collects water. Beneath this basin there is a grotto where a saintly priest is buried. They say that he was killed during the ancient times of the Saracens because they killed anyone they could find and didn't show mercy to anyone.

*Told by Angela Smiraglia at Capaci.*

<sup>275</sup> The title in Sicilian is *Lu Pizzareddu*, which is the diminutive of *pizzu*, the point or the highest part of a mountain.

## 240. THE MOUNTAIN OF THE RAJAH

**T**here is a hole at the Mountain of the Rajah, and this hole is cut in the form of sulphur. Above this hole there are doors here and there, and some sort of channel for water. Beyond the water you find a dilapidated house and then, beyond the mountain, the water has no dam or embankment. There's a treasure there, and that's where the money of the Saracens comes from.<sup>276</sup>

*Told to Pitrè by Pietro Loria, nicknamed Bònchiaro, at Salaparuta.*

## 241. THE THRONE OF THE TURK

**S**ome ancient bones and money were found in a throne. They say that this was the throne of a Turk who had the stature of a king, and he used to sit on this stone throne.

*Told by Pietro Loria, nicknamed Bònchiaro, at Salaparuta.*

## 242. THE CASTLE OF FICARAZZI

**T**he castle of Ficarazzi is an ancient castle, and in olden times the prince lived there with his entire entourage. This prince would ride up the castle stairs on horseback because the stairs were beautiful and royal. Below the castle there were dungeons, and they're still there; all the prince's prisoners were kept there. Sometimes, however, the prisoners vanished, and nobody ever knew what happened to them. In one of the rooms that served as a dungeon, there was a dark chamber that had a trapdoor. When the poor prisoner was brought to this chamber, it was all over: the prisoner just had to take less than two steps on this ground, and he fell through the trapdoor into a large hole. At the bottom he would be cut by blades, knives, daggers, spits, and sharp glass. Indeed, he would be torn to

<sup>276</sup> According to Pitrè Loria concluded his tale by saying, "a coin entered the stream and was carried by the current high and low. The water was cold and became frozen, and the coin could not move any further."

pieces and covered with blood all over. What a bitter fate! There was no pity for anyone. Even if he were the son of God, the sentence had to be carried out once the order left the lips of the prince.

In my day this trapdoor was closed because the times did not tolerate such things. Today people's eyes are open, and before they let themselves be executed by some lord like the prince, they see everything as it is and might not even be afraid to execute the lord.

This is the story about the Castle of Ficarazzi.

*Told by Cosmo Perlongo, nicknamed Ammutta, at Ficarazzi.*

## 243. THE PLAIN OF THE THRESHING FLOOR<sup>277</sup>

**S**ome time ago this plain was called the *Plain of the Gallows*, and it was given this name because this was where the gallows were always mounted and were never taken down. The prince kept watch over them, and nobody could say "what are you doing?" This is because the lords of Ficarazzi were their masters, and they could do whatever they wanted and send whoever they wished to their death. In fact, they had the peasants condemned by their very own people, other peasants. But those peasants who were the judges were judges in appearance only, because how could one make just laws if they were subjects of the princes and had to obey them? For instance, if someone did not please the prince, he would summon those judges and say, "I want you to charge this scum with offending my laws!"

And the peasants would immediately reply, "It's a violation, and you are sentenced to hang on the gallows!"

(Could they say no to the prince? They would have been decapitated.)

The gallows were perfectly equipped, and for better or worse the peasant was hanged.

The fact is that these convictions were frequent, and the record of them remains.

*Told by Cosmo Perlongo, nicknamed Ammutta, at Ficarazzi.*

<sup>277</sup> The Plain of the Threshing Floor is a small square behind the parochial Church of Ficarazzi, not far from the palace of the prince which is commonly called the Castle. It was on this plain that the peasants threshed their wheat.

244. THE CHASM<sup>278</sup>

**T**his valley is between the mountains La Cumeta and Malanuci near Piana de' Greci. It is a very deep chasm destined to swallow certain unfortunate people. At night there are ghosts, specters, evil shadows, and spirits that dance around. This is why mothers prohibit their children to spend any time there, even during the day. The wild pigeons make their nests there, and despite the grave danger, the hunters lower themselves down there by a rope tied to their torso. Most of these hunters are the ones who were born on the days of Friday and on Saint Paul's day, for these are the days that strong, robust, and invulnerable men are born.

*Told by an Albanian storyteller to Pitrè at Piana de' Greci.*

## 245. KEEP UP YOUR COURAGE, DON MENNU!

**I**'d like to tell you a little tale about the Grotto of Pizzu.

There was once a teacher by the name of Giuganni Catalanu di Casteltermini, and he dreamed of fetching the money at the Grotto of Pizzu with Don Mennu Miccichè. So, one day, they departed, arrived at the grotto, and entered. Once inside they saw a large amount of money, but they couldn't go any further because they saw two billy goats that began to squeal. Catalanu who was more courageous than Don Mennu jumped over the goats and passed by. But Don Mennu lost his courage, became frightened and felt like fainting. When Catalanu entered the place where the money was lying, he grabbed a handful of coins and stuck them in his pocket, but he couldn't get out. Don Mennu began to cry, "Oh beautiful Mother of God, help me!"

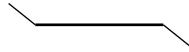
Catalanu replied, "Keep up your courage Don Mennu!"

Then Don Mennu cried out again, "Help me, oh beautiful Mother of God," and in a brief moment he found a way to get out. Catalanu tried but still couldn't get out, and then he heard a voice, "Leave it there! Leave it there!" and he felt a blow on his nose. So he took the money that he had in his pocket and left it there. And this is how Catalanu got out.

*Collected at Casteltermini.*

<sup>278</sup> The title "Xöni" is in Albanian, and the word *xöni* indicates abyss or chasm.

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# Proverbial Tales



## 246. LIVE AND LEARN<sup>279</sup>

**T**here's a tale told time and again that once there was an old man, extremely old and full of experience, who was sitting at his fireside. Along came a small boy, who asked him, "Would you please give me a live ember, so we can start the fire in our fireplace?"

"Yes, my boy, of course I'll give it to you—but what will you carry it in? I see you didn't bring anything with you, and fire burns, you know."

"That's not your problem," replied the boy. "Just give me what I asked for, and I'll take care of it."

"All right then, take it."

And what did the young boy do? He cupped his hand and filled it with cold ashes, placed the hot ember on top, and departed.

"Oh!" exclaimed the old man, slapping his hand to his forehead. "Here I am, with a whole lifetime of experience, and I never knew this simple trick. *Live and learn!*"

And from that time on, this expression became a proverb that has stayed with us.

*Told by the peasant Giuseppe Polizzi to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 247. FOR A GREAT PERSON, A SMALL GIFT

**O**nce a king came to Sicily and made the rounds of various towns. When he came to Trabia,<sup>280</sup> there was a local villager who, for lack of anything else to offer him, had picked some new figs and filled up a cart with them. When he saw the king, he offered these to him as if he were offering something special. But the king took offense, and turning to the man, he said, "Does this fellow think I'm starving, offering me all these figs?"

And he rode on.

Now in another town nearby, word had also come that the king was about

279 The Sicilian expression is, literally, "the more you live, the more you know" (*cchiù si campa cchiù si sapi*), but we have translated using the equivalent English proverb.

280 A village near Termini-Imerese, in the province of Palermo.

to make a visit. There was a local villager, and what do you think he did? He took just two pears, set them in a little basket, and when the king passed by, he came forth and offered him this present.

“For a great person, a small gift,” he said.

The gesture and words struck the king as so graceful that he accepted the pears and gave the man his thanks. And so the saying we have in Sicilian “For a great person, a small gift,” came into being from this event.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 248. BETWEEN ONE HORN AND THE OTHER, YOU CAN'T GET AT THE TRUTH

Once there was a wagon drawn by two oxen, and suddenly one of the oxen slipped and went *slam!* down on the ground. This caused the second ox to fall as well. The poor wagon driver called for help, and people came running to help lift the creatures off the ground. One of the men who was helping to lift an ox said to the fellow alongside him, “Poor beast! How did it happen to fall?” Another man turned and answered, “Can’t you see that this animal can’t stand up straight? When the poor creature walks, it wobbles.”

Well, they got the first ox to stand up, and then they went to help lift the ox on the other side. But although they tugged and tugged, they didn’t have the strength to get the ox back up on his feet. Finally, one of the men exclaimed, “It’s not the animal who’s to blame but the wagon driver! He’s the one who deserves to have the yoke on his neck.”

“How so?” asked the man who had wanted to know how the first ox fell.

“It’s the wagon driver who was keeping these two oxen from touching one another, because they had the bad habit of sticking each other with their horns and kicking one another.”

“Oh, the hell with all this!” exclaimed the other man. “*Between one horn and the other, you can’t get at the truth!*”

*Told by Francesca Amato in Palermo.*

## 249. NAVARRA CAN'T HEAR THE WORDS TO THIS SONG

**N**ow, the first thing you have to know is that this Navarra was a big thief who had pulled off all kinds of capers. Eventually he was caught and thrown in jail, and then brought to trial. When the judge began interrogating him, Navarra denied every single charge, saying over and over, "No, never! There's no truth in that. I don't know anything about it."

Well, the judge, seeing clearly that this method wasn't getting them anywhere, decided to use stronger means, and they tried beating him. But even so, Navarra kept denying he was involved in any way.

Finally, having gotten no results by these methods, the judge said to him,

"All right, Navarra, I'll make you an offer: if you can repeat back to me, word for word, a little song that I know, I promise to let you go home a free man."

"Fine," said Navarra. "Let's hear it."

And the judge began:

"Navarra didn't deserve to go to jail."

And Navarra repeated after him,

"Navarra didn't deserve to go to jail."

Then the judge added,

"Navarra was made to suffer torture."

And the answer came,

"Navarra was made to suffer torture."

Then the judge said,

"Because of the horses and mares that he stole."

Now Navarra understood that the judge was using this little game to get a confession out of him, and so he answered back,

"Navarra can't hear the words to this song."

And so he himself put an ending to the song.

*Told in Palermo by Rosa Brusca.*

## 250. HE WHO GOT FIRE SURVIVED, HE WHO GOT BREAD DIED

Once upon a time there was a group of sailors on a ship sailing in severe winter weather. The cold was enough to kill a man, and already the tips of their noses were starting to freeze and fall off. Then along came a terrible storm, battering the ship from left to right until finally its sides caved in and it sank to the bottom.

Well, as it pleased God, the sailors managed to survive, swimming on and on until they reached land. The people who were living there offered them whatever help they could give them. And so half of the sailors were taken to one house, and the other half to another. The first group was given bread, since it was a long time since they had eaten and they were starving to death. The second group asked to have a small fire to warm themselves, since they were stiff with cold. Well, the following morning it turned out that the ones who had eaten were found stiff and cold, having died from the chill, while those who had thought to warm themselves were all found alive and well.

And so it turned out that *He who got fire survived, he who got bread died.*  
*Told by Francesca Amato in Palermo.*

## 251. GOD WILL SEND HELP, AND THIS WILL DO THE REST!

Once there was a doctor who was a complete jackass. And what do you think he used to do? Every morning before going out, he would open up a big book, write down a few prescriptions, and stuff them in his pocket. Then he would make his rounds to visit his patients.

“How are you feeling?” he would ask.

“How do you think I’m feeling?” came the reply. “With all this pain, I might as well be dead!”

The doctor put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a prescription at random.

“Here, take this. God will send help, and this will do the rest.”<sup>281</sup> And saying this, he handed it to the sick man.

Then he would proceed to the next patient.

“How are you feeling?”

“How do you think I’m feeling? I’m burning up with this terrible fever!”

“All right, I can make you well again.”

And the doctor would take out another prescription and hand it to him.

“God will send help, and this will do the rest.”

And so that’s the way this doctor dealt with all his patients, and then, whoever happened to die, happened to die.

*Told in Palermo by Rosa Brusca.*

## 252. DON’T TELL SECRETS TO WOMEN, HAVE POLICEMEN AS FRIENDS, OR LIVE IN A HOUSE WITH A TRELLIS

Once upon a time there were a husband and wife whose close friend<sup>282</sup> was a policeman, and they lived in a house with a trellis. This wife was clearly the kind of woman you could trust with your secrets, and she took great pride in that reputation. The husband, man that he was, was eager to find some way of testing both his wife and his friend. So this is what he did.

He came home one day carrying something wrapped up in a cloth, went straight to the well, and dumped the object down the well.

“What was that you did?” asked his wife, who naturally was curious.

“Oh, nothing,” he replied.

“What do you mean, nothing? Your face has a funny look, and you want me to believe there’s nothing going on?”

“All right, if you really want to know, I’ll tell you. But beware now, because if this gets known, I can hang for it. The fact is, I killed a man, and then cut

281 Our translation can capture only part of the complex irony of the original: *Diu ti la manna bona! ca la tinta l’haju di supra!* whose literal meaning is “God sends you the good and the bad comes with me.” But the word *tinta* may offer a pun, since it means “bad” in Sicilian and “ink” in Italian. Hence the second phrase may also be saying that the prescription I bring you, as writing, is an evil weighing against any benefit from God.

282 The word we translate as “close friend” is *cumpari*, which can imply kinship as well.

off his head so that his body wouldn't be recognizable. And now I've hidden that head in our well. But remember, mum's the word!"

"No problem!" answered the wife. "It's as if you told it to the wall."

Now the husband acted strangely, as if something was bothering him. And so the good friend, who often visited their house, finally had to ask the wife, "My dear woman, I see that my friend's looking very troubled. Is there something wrong?"

"Oh, no. Nothing really."

"Oh, yes, there must be something going on. Tell me what it is."

"Oh, all right, I can tell you. But you must promise, please, not to mention it to anyone else, or else we're ruined!"

"Of course, not. You have my word."<sup>283</sup>

But it was as if she had said, "Go announce it to the world."

The friend couldn't help but act like the policeman he was, and he went straight to the judge and told him the whole story.

"And who is this criminal?" demanded the judge.

"It's so-and-so," replied the policeman, naming the man.

"And which house does he live in?"

"It's the one with the trellis by the front door, facing the window. You can't miss it."

The judge immediately sent policemen and gendarmes to the house. They found the front door locked, but the window with the trellis was open and they went in that way. They seized the husband and dragged him directly to the well.

"Where's the head of the man you murdered?" they asked.

"Murdered? I didn't murder anybody. What's this all about?"

"We'll show you what it's all about," they said, and they lowered a policeman down the well to retrieve the head. Once he had it in his hand, he felt it all around and found that it had hair and horns.

"Here's the head," he told them. "And it has hair on it. But it also has horns."

"What do you mean, it has horns?" asked the sergeant, and he had a second man sent down. This man took hold of the head, and he, too, discovered the horns.

"Yes, it's true," he said. "This head has horns."

By now the husband was laughing and laughing. But the policemen were all sent down the well, one after another, still trying to find something. Finally,

283 In Sicilian the man's reply is simply "By St. John!" (*'Nta lu San Giuvanni!*), the equivalent of swearing an oath of secrecy.

the police sergeant realized this was some kind of joke, and he asked the husband to explain. The man said that he had the kind of wife who acted as if you could never pry a secret out of her, and a close friend who was a policeman. "And so," he continued, "I decided to put them both to a test. I bought a ram's head and threw it down the well, and then told this good woman that I had murdered a man and cut off his head. My wife went and told it to my policeman friend, and his way of keeping the secret was to report it immediately. And now that I've seen the little drama I created, I leave you this reminder, for as long as you live.

Don't Tell Secrets to Women,  
Have Policemen as Friends, or  
Live in a House with a Trellis."

*Told by the blind man Giovanni Patuano in Palermo.*

## 253. A BIG FIGHT OVER A BEDSPREAD

**O**nce there was a husband and wife, and the husband was the sort of man who would hasten to break up any fight or scuffle that he was aware of. When people engaged in a quarrel, they grew accustomed to summoning him, and they dubbed him "Mr. Peace." This Mr. Peace knew no rest and was constantly being called upon to settle fights.

Well, since this habit of his was so familiar, four thugs decided to play a trick on him. They came together under his window one night and pretended to be fighting and hitting one another with staffs. When Mr. Peace heard all this commotion in the middle of the night, he said to his wife,

"Hush a moment! I hear a big fight going on, and I'm going to go and break it up."

"What business is it of yours?" she replied. "Let them kill one another. You're carrying this peacemaking much too far! Isn't it enough that you do it in all day long? Why should I be bothered with it during the night?"

"No, dear, you'd better let me go, otherwise someone might get killed."

The husband refused to be persuaded to stay in bed and got up and began searching in the dark for matches to light the lamp. However, he couldn't find them, and neither could he find his clothes. Since he had no way to get dressed, he had to resort to pulling the bedspread off the bed and wrapping himself in it. This left his wife completely uncovered, and she cried out,

"Now you've taken the whole bedcover and left me stark naked! Can't I get any peace from you by day or by night?"

But Mr. Peace was already out the door and confronting the men.

"What is it with you fellows?" he cried out. "Why do you have to be fighting at this hour of the night?"

But the thugs simply made a bigger ruckus. Finally they pulled the bedspread off the man and went off carrying it over their shoulders. When Mr. Peace found himself completely naked, without even a nightshirt, he went back up to his bedroom totally distraught, and said to his wife, "Look! I tried to do good and ended up the victim!"

"You fool!" shouted his wife when she saw him standing there naked. "You actually let them make off with the bedspread? Just wait here!"

And she picked up a big stick and began giving him a beating, chasing him out of the house and locking the door.

And so, while our tale about Mr. Peace comes to an end, it also explains the origin of the saying, "A big fight over a bedspread."

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 254. DON'T SAY "FOUR" TILL IT'S IN THE BAG

Once upon a time there was a monk who went around soliciting contributions, and he always had a young boy with him, one of the kitchen-boys who worked in the convent. Now, there was a certain group of devout believers who were in the habit of giving this monk some bread on the first Monday of each month. Their practice was to have the bread thrown down from the second storey. They would invite the monk upstairs and then give him the loaves to be thrown down to the boy, who would open his sack and collect all the loaves into it. As the loaves came down, the boy would begin counting aloud without waiting for the full number of loaves to fall.

Well, it happened one Monday that the monk began throwing down the loaves, and the boy cried "One!" as the first loaf arrived. The monk threw the second, and the boy cried "Two!" then "Three!" and "Four!"

But the fourth loaf, instead of ending up in the sack, hit the boy on the nose and dealt him quite a blow.

"Ow!" cried the boy. "You almost killed me!"

"Don't say 'Four!' till it's in the bag!" the monk shouted at him.

And that's where they say this proverb comes from.

*Told by Francesca Amato in Palermo.*

## 255. “LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL”<sup>284</sup> SAID THE MOTHER-IN-LAW TO HER DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

Once there was a mother-in-law who said to her daughter-in-law, “Let the good times roll.”

The daughter-in-law did not understand that this meant one should always be ready to make good use of God’s gifts. One beautiful day, when the sun was shining like a jewel, the daughter-in-law climbed onto the roof of the house and began to lift the tiles so that the house became exposed.

“Ahh!” she cried out, “now I’ll let all the good times<sup>285</sup> roll in.”

*Told by Rosa Brusca at Palermo.*

## 256. THE CARESSES OF TINCHIUNI

Tinchiuni was a married man, and he had a wife whom he loved very much, so much that he became crazy over her. He sat at the breakfast table, and after eating, he got up and gave her a kiss and went to sit down at the cobbler’s bench, for he was a shoemaker. Then he got up and went to give her a few more kisses. Then he went and lay down and got up and gave her a kiss. He couldn’t get enough of her as he continually kissed and caressed her.

One night he became delirious. He embraced her and hugged her, embraced and hugged her. His wife realized that he was doing this out of love for her and didn’t say a thing. But the kisses, caresses, and close attention became so strong that his wife could not get her breath, and she was suffocated to death. And this is why the people talk about the caresses of Tinchiuni, who killed his wife through kisses.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina at Palermo.*

<sup>284</sup> The Sicilian proverb is *Pigghia lu bon tempu e ’nfilatillu dintra*. Literally this means, “Take the good times and put them (or let them enter) inside.” The joke is based on the daughter-in-law’s literal understanding of the proverb and the double meaning of *tempu* as “time” and weather.”

<sup>285</sup> “Good times” here translates as *tempu*, which can also be understood to mean “weather.”

## 257. WITH THE SCISSORS

Once upon a time there was a man and his wife, and it seems to me that the man was a tailor. The wife as well, and she was also a diligent housewife. One day, when the husband entered the kitchen, he found many things broken—pots, glasses, plates, all broken.

“How were they broken?” he asked.

“How should I know?” his wife replied.

“What do you mean, how should I know? Tell me who broke them.”

“Who broke them? . . . Well, I did with the scissors,” the wife said in anger.

“With the scissors?”

“With the scissors!”

“Are you telling the truth? . . . I want you to tell me what you used to break everything, otherwise I’ll beat you!”

“With the scissors,” she replied, for she had the scissors in her hand.

“Scissors, you said?”

“Scissors they were.”

“Ah, scissors!? Wait a second and I’ll show you whether it was you with the scissors.”

So, he tied a rope around her and began lowering her down into the well, “Well, how did you break everything? Do you see that I’m lowering you down into the well?”

“With the scissors.”

Seeing how stubborn she was, the husband kept lowering her down into the well, and the wife didn’t shut up.

“How did you break everything?” the husband asked again.

“With the scissors!”

So the husband dropped her some more until she was halfway down the well.

“What did you use to break everything?”

“The scissors!”

So the husband became furious and lowered her until her feet touched the water.

“How did you break everything?”

“With the scissors!”

Then he lowered her to her waist.

“What did you do it with?”

“With the scissors!”

“Take care!” he warned her, angry at seeing her this way. “It will take little

to let you drop into the water all the way. Better you tell me. How's it possible to break pots and plates with the scissors? What's become of the pieces if you cut them?"

"It was the scissors! The scissors!"

When he heard this, he let go of the rope, and *splash!* his wife was now all wet.

"Are you satisfied now? Do you still say it was the scissors?"

The wife couldn't talk anymore because she had fallen into the water. So what did she do? (She was a woman, and women have heads as hard as rocks.) She stuck her hand out of the water and began making signs with her fingers as if she were cutting with the scissors. What could the poor husband do but say, "I'm losing my wife, and I'd better go after her. I'll pull her out, and she can even say it was the scissors or the shears."

So he pulled her out, and there was no way that he could get her to tell him what she had used to break all the things in the kitchen.

And this tale shows how stubborn our women are, for even with the noose around their necks they will never change their minds.

*Told by Rosa Brusca at Palermo.*

## 258. YOU'RE TAKING ME FROM CAVE TO CAVE, FROM NORTH TO SOUTH, LIKE A YAWN THAT PASSES FROM MOUTH TO MOUTH<sup>286</sup>

**T**his tale's been told time and again about a husband and wife who had recently married. One day, while a friend was visiting, the husband noticed that the friend yawned, and that his wife also yawned. Then the friend yawned again, and she immediately responded with a yawn.

"Ah," the husband thought to himself, "have you cheated on me with my friend? What are those signs that you're making right in front of me? Just wait! I'll put an end to your amusement." So he called his wife to him and said that he wanted to take a walk with her in the countryside.

"Well, let's go," said his wife.

<sup>286</sup> The title in Sicilian is: *Mi vai purtannu di grutta 'n grutta, comu lu badàgghiu di vucca 'n vucca*. Literally, it means "You're taking me from cave to cave like a yawn from mouth to mouth." We've made slight changes and added "from north to south" to keep the rhyme.



So they walked and walked, and her husband took her from one cave to another.

Meanwhile (bear in mind) he was carrying a very long knife with him and wanted to cut his wife's throat because it seemed to him that she had cuckolded him. When they reached a cave, he was about to pull out his dagger, but he couldn't do it because his wife seemed so beautiful to him. His love for her grew deeper even though he knew he should be cutting her throat. So, they left the cave, and he took her by the arm and led her to another one. There, too, his heart was so troubled that he couldn't kill her. So he took her to another cave. When his wife watched him walk around and do all these detours without saying anything, she finally said, "Where are we going, my husband? Why do we have to take this walk?"

Her husband responded, "Keep going. I'm looking for a place where we can have a good snack." And he continued to take her from one cave to the next thinking he would kill her, but then he would always take pity on her. After they had gone to more than ten caves, the wife, who didn't know why they were doing this, felt drained by all this. So she turned and said, "Oh, my husband, you've taken me from cave to cave, from north to south, like a yawn that passes from mouth to mouth."

"What did you say? What did you say?" her husband asked.

"What did I say? I said you've taken me from cave to cave, from north to south, like a yawn that passes from mouth to mouth."

"What do you mean by that? Why did you say such a thing?"

"Because it's true—a yawn catches and passes from mouth to mouth. If somebody yawns, the other person who sees it will also yawn. If you're in a church, for example, and one person yawns, all the other people will open their mouths and begin to yawn."


"Oh, my wife, with these words you've saved your life. I've brought you here to kill you because I thought you had cheated on me with my friend. He yawned and you yawned more than one time, and it seemed to me that there was something going on between you. Now I see that you're innocent, and I love you more than ever. Besides, you've taught me something new."

So they made their peace with one another and returned to their home happy and content. And this is how the saying was born:

"you've taken me from cave to cave, from north to south,  
like a yawn that passes from mouth to mouth."


*Told by Margherita Martorna, washerwoman, and collected by  
Salvatore Salomone-Marino at Partinico.*

## 259. THE MAN WHO HAD SCRUPLES ABOUT A DROP OF MILK

nce there was a convict who, if I said he had robbed a thousand times, I'd be saying too small a number. People like to say that every thief and whore has religion and performs their devotions. And this thief's devotion was not to eat meat or drink milk on Holy Thursday out of respect for the Lord. It so happened one time, as things do, that he gulped down a drop of milk on a Holy Thursday. Immediately he had scruples because he had drunk some milk and ran to confess and receive absolution for this great sin. Well, the priest said to him, "This is new! . . . You have scruples about this drop of milk, and you don't have any in the least when you rob, even if you rob God!"

*Told by Rosa Brusca at Palermo.*

## 260. SAVE THE GOAT AND THE CABBAGES

nce upon a time there was a peasant, and he had a goat, a bunch of cabbages, and a wolf, and when he had to go through a pass in the mountains, he became uneasy.

"What am I to do?" he said to himself. "We have to go through the pass one by one. If not, we won't make it . . . What am I to do? If the wolf goes through first, the goat will eat the cabbages. If the cabbages go through first, the wolf will eat the goat. If the goat goes through first, then at the second trip the goat will eat the cabbages or the wolf will eat the goat . . . What am I to do?"

He thought and thought . . . And what do you think he did? Well, first he took the goat through the pass. Then he returned and took the cabbages to the other side where he picked up the goat and brought the goat back to the other side of the pass where the wolf was. Then he lifted the wolf on his arm and kept it on one side and took the goat on the other side, and they went through the pass. And this is how he saved the goat and the cabbages.

This anecdote gave birth to the saying "save the goat and the cabbages."

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## 261. THE OLD WOMAN SAID TO KING NERO: “THE WORST IS YET TO COME”

**N**ero was a king who treated all his subjects poorly, and they all thought he was evil. This malicious king used to go about in disguise to taverns, restaurants, and cafes to hear the opinion of the people and to hear who had bad things to say about him and who had good things to say (and indeed, nobody had good things to say).

One day he decided to go into the countryside, and he encountered an old woman.

“What are you doing, my good woman?”

“I’m trying to earn some bread,” she replied.

“Poor woman, poor woman. In these times nobody can make a living! It’s true, isn’t it? And it’s all because of King Nero, who’s very evil.”

The old woman turned to him and responded, “May God keep and preserve him!”

When Nero heard this, he was stunned and said, “How is it that you can speak so well of him while everyone else says bad things?”

“I’ll tell you, cavalier (for the old woman thought he was a cavalier). First we had a king, and everyone spoke badly about him, but he was really not so bad. Then another came who was worse. Afterward there was another who came and went. Now we have Nero and we pray that the Lord keeps every mother’s son safe from him. So I say, may God keep and preserve him because ‘the worst is yet to come.’ ”

*Told by Agatuzza Messina at Palermo.*

## 262. AS A PEAR TREE YOU NEVER PRODUCED PEARS, AND AS A SAINT YOU DON’T PRODUCE MIRACLES

**O**ne time in a church of Nicosia there was a crucifix made of a stump of a dried-up pear tree that no longer produced pears. There was a peasant who went to this church every day and prayed for a favor, weeping tears of blood. The crucifix did not hear his pleas, and the peasant withdrew. One time the poor man lost his patience and turned to the crucifix

and said, "As a pear tree you never produced pears, and as a saint you don't produce miracles." And he went away.

And this is how the proverb started.

*Told to Pitre by a waiter of the Di Venetia hotel at Catania.*

### 263. ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN EXCEPT FOR A MAN GETTING PREGNANT; AND YET, THERE WAS THIS PREGNANT MAN OF MONREALE

**T**his pregnant man of Monreale was one who went around with a swollen stomach and thighs, and they were so swollen that he was about to die. The doctors came, and they cut him open, and instead of water or even pus that came pouring out, there was a baby boy. Everyone was extremely astonished, and they still talk about the pregnant man of Monreale.

*Told by Rosa Brusca at Palermo.*

### 264. LIKE THE FIANCÉE WITH THE SHAVED EYEBROWS

**T**his saying originated in ancient times when young women got married and shaved their eyebrows. This was a sign that the maiden was taken, and nobody could claim her.

Does the wife still keep her eyebrows shaved after the wedding ceremony nowadays? Indeed, the wife keeps her eyebrows shaved so, if one wants to know if she is married, one knows this by the fact that she is shaven, and this woman is not to have anything to do with the young men.

From then on, when a person is in a situation where his hands are tied and he is completely stymied, they say that he is like the wife with the shaved eyebrows.

*Told to Pitre by a man at Salaparuta.*

## 265. FOR A SINGLE CALABRIAN ONION, FOUR CALABRIANS LOST THEIR LIVES

Once, my good sirs, there were four Calabrians—and you know that one of them is already too much for any town.<sup>287</sup> They were bringing a load of Calabrian onions to sell in Messina, taking them by boat, and they were rowing quickly in their eagerness to arrive when suddenly one of the onions fell overboard. Well, since each of these Calabrians was more miserly than the next, one of them stripped off his clothes at once and dived in after it. When his companions saw no sign of him after a couple of minutes, a second stripped off his clothes and dived in. When the two remaining men saw no further sign of him either, one of them took off his shirt and trousers (no need to remove his shoes, since he had only the ones he was born with)<sup>288</sup> and also threw himself into the sea, since the loss of a single onion was more than he could endure.

Now, you should know that in that area between Reggio and Messina the sea is very dangerous, and the slightest ripple will swallow men down as if they were roasted chickpeas. And so naturally none of these three men, who had plunged into the water, ever returned to the surface. At this point the fourth Calabrian reflected on what had happened, and then blurted out: “By God! Those three are devouring the onion all by themselves!”

And so he himself, fully dressed as he was, hurled himself into the sea to catch up with his companions and the onion.


Eventually some fishermen came along, who had been watching this scene from a distance, and they brought the empty boat into the harbor at Messina. And that was how *For a single Calabrian onion, four Calabrians lost their lives*.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

287 As Pitrè notes, this is a well known Sicilian proverb denigrating the Calabrians: *Calavrisi, mancu unu pi paisi, e si cchiù cci nn'esti, fuju comu pesti*, which means “May there never be more than one Calabrian in any town, and should there be more, flee it like the plague.”

288 This is a humorous way of referring to a barefoot person in popular idiom.

## 266. LOSING BOTH THE DONKEY AND THE CAROBS


nce there was a peddler from Capaci, one of those usually found selling hay in Palermo, but this one was leading a donkey loaded with carob fruit. Well, one of the local street thieves came along, reached with his hand, and grabbed a fistful of carobs. But the man from Capaci dealt him such a swift kick in the crotch that it laid the poor fellow flat out on the ground.

Now a crowd of people came running up and screamed, "Oh, that poor poor fellow! Look at what that country bumpkin has done, nearly killing this poor man!" And with this they seized the peddler from Capaci and held him until the police arrived. One policeman took hold of the peddler, another attended to the man, who had passed out on the ground, and a third took charge of the donkey.

Next followed the courtroom appearance, lawyers, the counsel for the defense, listening to all sorts of testimonies, and it was only a miracle that the poor peddler from Capaci was released. But, by the end of the proceeding he came away losing both the donkey and the carobs.

*Told in Palermo by Agatuzza Messia.*

## 267. WITH GOD ON MY SIDE, I CAN LAUGH AT THE SAINTS

nce upon a time there was a pagan who had himself baptized and then committed himself to the worship of Jesus Christ. People took him into a church and began teaching him about all the saints and the different altars.

"Do you see that one? He's St. Joseph, and the other one there is St. Joachim, the father of Mary. This one is St. Gaetano, and that one is St. Francis of Paula. This one is St. Mary Magdalene, and that one is St. Benedict."

And in this manner they taught him who all the saints were. Next, they said to him, "Now look over here: this figure is God."

"Well, now," asked the baptized pagan, "can you tell me exactly what these saints do?"

"Why, they perform all sorts of miracles and favors."

“And what does this God do?”

“Why, God is like the chief saint presiding over all the other saints, the father and lord of them all.”

“And can God perform miracles too?”

“Of course! He is the great performer of miracles, and it is only through his will that all the miracles and favors are done. All the saints are under his power, and as the proverb puts it, ‘Not even the leaf on the tree stirs without the will of God.’ ”

“Ah, so all these saints can’t do anything on their own account, without the will of God?”

“That’s right.”

“Well then, why should I stand here and worship these saints, if they don’t know how to do anything on their own? As far as I’m concerned, you can go and do whatever you like, St. Joseph and Joachim and Francis of Paula and the rest of you, big ones and little ones alike. *With God on my side, I can laugh at the saints.*” And he went away and from then on worshiped and prayed only to God.

And so the words that this pagan spoke survived as a proverb.

*Told by the countryman Giuseppe Polizzi to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 268. IN PALERMO, YOU NEED A SACK THIS BIG!

**T**he bronze statue that stands in Piazza Bologni says, “*In Palermo, you need a sack this big!*” The statue is holding its hand raised up to here, as if it were trying to warm it, and what it means is that to survive in Palermo you need a sack of money big enough to reach from the ground all the way up to this hand. Palermo is a place where money goes like water, and to be able to buy food and clothes there you need a purse with no drawstring.

There are others who give a different meaning to what the statue is saying: “*In Palermo, you need a sack of money this high to obtain any justice.*” That’s because money is the golden key that opens every door, and in former times in Palermo the judges would simply sell justice for money.

*Told by Giuseppa Foria in Ficarazzi.*

## 269. IN JIBBISU, THEY WHIP ROOSTERS

There's a story told about the people of Jibbisu,<sup>289</sup> where there was once a rooster that didn't sing. The result was that all the Jibbisoti overslept until it was really late. When they finally woke up at noon and realized they had lost a whole morning's work because of that rooster, what do you think they did to punish him? They grabbed him, tied him on a donkey, and took him through the town, whipping him as they went, until finally they had to be brought before a judge.

So, this is why people say, "The Jibbisoti, They Whip Roosters," and when a person from Jibbisu comes to Messina, we ask him, "Hey, Peppi, did your rooster sing?"

*Told by a fisherman in Messina.*

## 270. THE CARINISI ARE DOGS!

They claim that, at the time of the incident concerning the Baroness of Carini, a famous story,<sup>290</sup> the poor young woman went running from one room to another trying to escape her father, who wanted to stab her to death. Meanwhile she kept shouting, "Help me, people of Carini, help me!" But, in fact, none of the Carinisi ran to help her, and her father was able to deliver a fatal knife wound to his daughter's heart. Just as he did this, the young woman lamented that nobody had come to help her and cried out in a terrible voice, "What dogs you are, people of Carini!" because they refused to come to her aid. And that's where we get the saying, "The Carinisi are dogs!"

*Told by the peasant Giovanni Amato to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

<sup>289</sup> This is the local dialect name for Gesso, a town near Messina. We have kept the original Sicilian name for both the town and its inhabitants.


<sup>290</sup> This well-known story was preserved in a popular ballad or short epic titled *La Barunissa di Carini*. See the endnote for further details.



# Brief Tales, Fables, and Animal Stories



## 271. BRANCALIUNI!<sup>291</sup>

nce upon a time there was a peasant from the hills who had an ass and earned his living by collecting firewood. One day, as he was returning from gathering wood, the ass fell and could not get up. The peasant took off the saddle and left the ass on the ground for dead and went away. That night the ass revived and went to some field where it began to eat and gradually became nice and fat. One day a wolf appeared and began to look around and approached the ass slowly but surely. When the ass saw the wolf, it said, "Oh what a bitter fate! The wolf's going to eat me!"

And it assumed a haughty posture with ears stiff, the tail up high, and the back arched, and it looked at the wolf straight in the eyes. When the wolf saw this ferocious-looking ass, it asked, "What's your name?"

"I'm called Bran . . . ca . . . liuni."

"What a terrible name you have!" the wolf responded, and it approached slowly. When the ass saw it come so close, it became scared and let off four great farts.

"Brancaliuni, what have you shot off?" the wolf asked.

"Those were shots from my cannon," the ass responded. "I've got a cannon, and when I shoot it, I can kill wolves and all sorts of things."

When the wolf heard this, it said, "I'd like to eat a little chicken meat. So I'd like you to kill some chickens for me tomorrow with your cannon. I'll come back here, and you'll give me something to eat."

"All right, come back tomorrow," said the ass.

When the wolf departed, the ass became worried.

"How am I going to do this?" he said and went to lie down in a small spot and pretended to be dead. All at once some crows and vultures swooped down, thinking the ass was dead, and they approached his head to eat him. When the ass, however, saw the right time, it began kicking and biting and killed a few of the birds. Then the ass got up and left the dead birds there. Some time later the wolf arrived.

"Brancaliuni, where are the birds?"

So the ass brought out the birds from the spot where he had killed them.

"Here they are. Eat them."

<sup>291</sup> *Brancaliuni* literally means the claw of the lion.

The wolf ate the birds and said, "Oh how good they are! I've never eaten birds as delicious as these!"

"Now, my friend," the ass said, "it's your turn to do what I did."

"Well, then," replied the wolf, "I'll get some rabbits, and you'll eat them."

"No, my friend, I suffer from acids, and I can't eat rabbit. You've got to get me some green things to eat."

"My friend, Brancaliuni," said the wolf, "I know a garden filled with cabbages that are marvelous. I'll bring you there."

So they went to the garden, and the ass began to eat and filled his stomach so much that he couldn't walk anymore.

"We had better go," the wolf said. "The owner's coming."

There was a high fence, and the wolf jumped over, but the ass couldn't make it, and his feet became caught in the fence. The wolf grabbed his feet to help him and pull him over. Then the ass began to fart so much that pellets of turd went flying, and many hit the wolf. When the wolf felt the pellets of turd—some of them hit his legs—he cried out, "Oh friend Brancaliuni, what are you doing?"

"I'm just amusing myself, my friend," the ass responded.

In the meantime, the wolf began to run because he was afraid of the pellets, and he limped away.

The ass laughed and said, "All the better now that I've got rid of you with this strategy."

While the wolf was running, he came across the lion, who asked him, "Why are you running so fast?"

"I've got to run because of Brancaliuni who shot me in the leg with some pellets from his cannon, and he's made me lame."

"My friend," responded the lion, "I want to go and see this Brancaliuni."

"Oh, brother lion, he's more powerful than you are."

"Well then, here's what we'll do. We'll attack him from the rear with a rope. If you can't walk because you're lame, I'll drag you along."

So they began walking back to the ass, and when they approached and were near, the ass saw them, and as usual he raised his ears straight, arched his back, and raised his tail. "Now," he said to himself, "the time has come."

When the lion saw that the ass was prepared for them, he said, "Let's approach him slowly but surely."

As they advanced, the ass was totally frightened and began to discharge pellets of turd. When the wolf heard the pellets, he cried out, "Oh, brother lion, let's run. If we're hit with one of the pellets, we'll be killed."

The wolf couldn't run because he was lame, and the lion dragged him along. This was how the ass liberated himself and managed not to be eaten by

the lion and the wolf. Then the ass said to himself, "I'd better leave this region. If I don't, the wolf will return and eat me."

So, the ass began to walk and eventually returned to his owner. When his owner saw that the ass had become nice and fat, he gladly took the animal back. He put the saddle on the back of the ass once again and led him off, and the ass began to carry wood once again just as he had done before.

*Told by Vincenzo Midulla, a miner, and collected by Gaetano Di Giovanni at Casteltermini.*

## 272. THE TWO MICE

**T**here was once a mouse who said to another mouse, "Do you want to come and eat with me at my uncle's place?"

The other mouse, who was dying of hunger, replied, "Yes, but where does he live?"

"You don't have to worry. He lives nearby."

The two of them departed and went to a shop. This shop had a door with a very small hole so that the cats could get in and get out. When the mice arrived, the mouse who made the suggestion to visit his uncle, said to his friend, "You go in first, and I'll go in after you."

"Forget it!" said the other mouse. "You're the leader. So you've got to go in first."

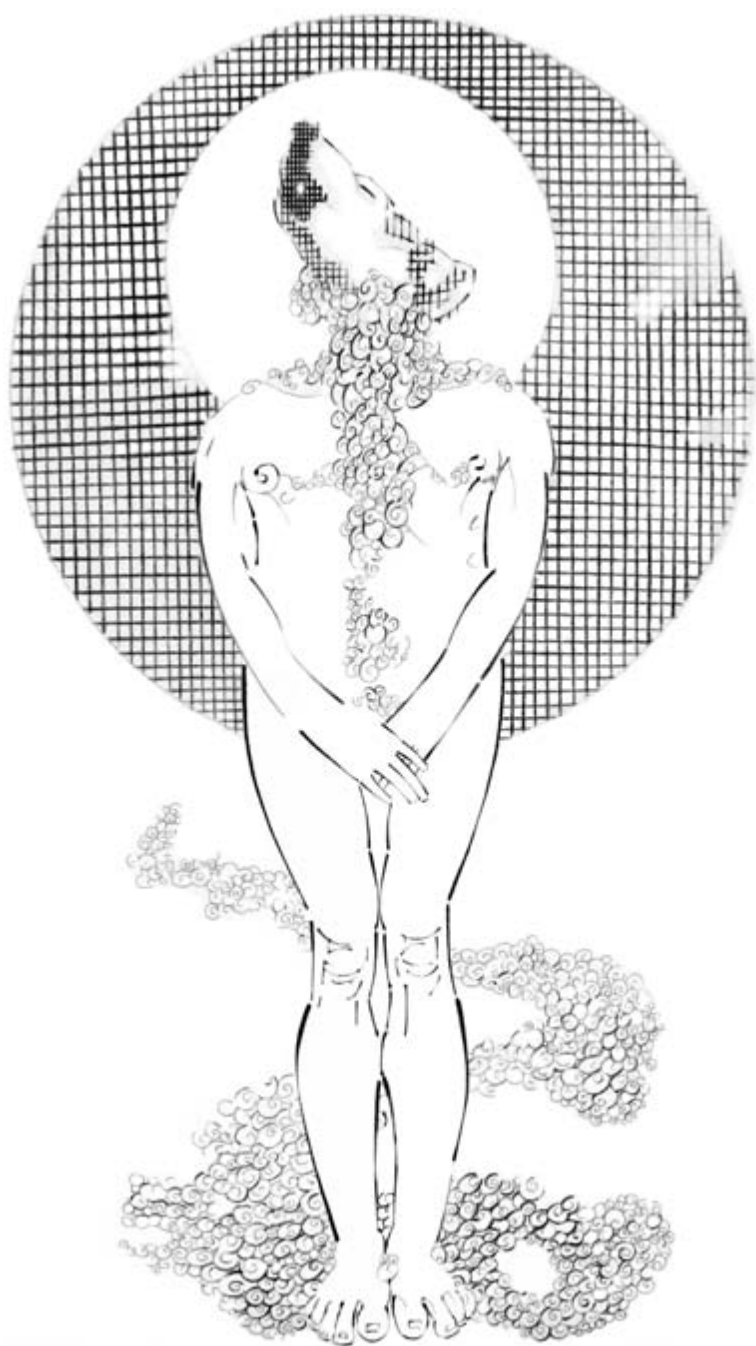
Since this mouse was the one that had wanted to call on his uncle, he had no choice but to enter first. Just as he entered the shop, however, there was a cat that grabbed him by the back of the neck, and the mouse began to cry out: "Ziu! Ziu! Uncle! Uncle!"<sup>292</sup>

When the other mouse heard this, he said, "Poor thing! I'll never see you or your uncle again!"

Then he turned on his heels and returned to where he had come from.

*Told by a man named Comparetto at Ficcarazzi.*

292 In Sicilian there is a play upon words. *Ziu! Ziu!* means "Uncle! Uncle!" and it is also the sound of the shriek of the mouse.



## 273. THE MAN, THE WOLF, AND THE FOX

**P**eople say that there was once upon a time a poor woodcutter who made his living by carrying wood on his shoulders from the forest to sell in the city. One morning, while he was on his way to the city, he heard some cries and moans. So he went toward the place where he heard the cries, and when he arrived, he saw a deep hole. A wolf had fallen into it, and on top of him there was a large rock so that he could not get out. When the wolf saw the woodcutter, he said, "Do me a favor, and get me out of here, and I'll return the favor."

But the woodcutter thought about this and then responded, "I'd gladly do this, but after I save your life, you'll repay me by eating me."

"No, I'd never do such a thing!" the wolf replied. "Instead, if you are ever in the forest when some other wolf comes and wants to eat you, I'll defend you with my life."

After saying this, he made a thousand other pledges. Then the poor woodcutter said to him, "All right, I'm going to look for a ladder, and I'll return soon to get you out of the hole."

Indeed, he quickly fetched a ladder, returned to the wolf, and set the ladder down into the hole. Then he pulled as hard as he could to get the rock off the wolf and saved the poor beast from death.

When the wolf was able to get out of the hole totally worn out and flayed, the woodcutter took the ladder and said goodbye to the wolf. But then the wolf said, "Not so fast, my friend. Where are you going? I haven't eaten in three days, my good sir, and I'm dying of hunger. So, what better thing to eat than you?"

"What?" said the woodcutter. "You want to eat me?"

And he stood there trembling with fright. Then he summoned his courage and said, "Let's remember our deal. What's happened to everything that you promised? How good is your word? Is this the reward I get for saving your life? Now you want to eat me! Oh no, this isn't fair! How can you be such a bully?"

"Stop all your chattering!" the wolf cried. "I'm dying of hunger. So let's just walk further on toward the shade where I can eat you."

The wolf pushed him with his tail, and finally the woodcutter said, "Let's walk along the path until we meet three people. We'll explain what happened, and that you want to eat me, and if they say, yes, then you should eat me, and if they say no, you've got to let me go free."

When the wolf saw how clever he was, he said, "All right, we'll do as you say," and they began to walk along the path.

They walked and walked until they encountered a man, and the woodcutter told him all that had happened. Then the wolf added "Well, I'm hungry, and I don't know what to do. So you decide what I should do."

The man was frightened that the wolf would grab him and eat him, and so he said, "I don't have anything to say against what you want because hunger is a terrible thing."

So the wolf turned to the woodcutter and said, "You see, this first man agrees, and I have one in favor of me."

They continued to walk a while until they encountered a fox. So the wolf and the man called the fox to them, and each explained his side of the story. Then the fox replied, "Whenever I'm hungry, I'd even eat the dirt on the ground, because I'd rather eat rotten bread than die."<sup>293</sup>

Then the wolf turned to the woodcutter and said, "You only have one more turn. My hunger's growing, and I think it was a bad idea to let you live."

But the woodcutter made him walk on for a while to meet someone else, and indeed, when they went on a bit, they met a lion, and the woodcutter said to himself, "I'm dead for sure! The lion will certainly say the wolf is right, and both of them will eat me." The wolf, on the other hand, was pleased and said this was the perfect time to tell the story. So both of them approached the lion, and the poor woodcutter, completely frightened, recounted all that had happened and how he had saved the wolf from certain death and that the wolf had made many promises, and afterward, the wolf would not listen to reason and wanted to eat him. So, everything depended on the lion's judgment whether the wolf should eat him or not, according to the pact made between the man and the wolf. When the lion heard all the facts, he said, "I can't say who is right or who is wrong if I don't see the hole, the rock, and how the wolf was lying there and how the woodcutter managed to save the wolf's life. After I see this, I'll give you my decision."

So this is what they did. They returned to the hole once more, and the wolf climbed down into it. Then the lion said to him, "Put yourself in the same position you were, and I and the woodcutter will slowly place the rock on top of you."

Indeed, the wolf lay down, and they went to get the rock

"Now wait until we both climb back up, and I'll determine what the woodcutter did to you."

So they climbed back up and pulled up the ladder. Then the lion looked


293 This is a Sicilian proverb:  
*Pri tristu pani*  
*Nun si mori di fami.*

down at the wolf from above and said, "Listen, you notorious and cunning wolf, you may always change your skin, but you can't change your vice.<sup>294</sup> Stay there, and may you die of hunger until those who dug this hole to catch you come back and kill you. If you had been an honorable and courteous creature, you would have thanked and kissed the person who saved your life instead of wanting to eat him. And you, my good man (turning to the woodcutter), go about your business. May you toil and provide food for your children, and teach them that they must learn the right way to do a good deed and must know something about the person they're doing it for."

After saying this, the lion took his leave and went away. The poor woodcutter returned to his home and told everyone the story, more wasted and more dead than alive.

*Collected by Salvatore-Pasquale Vigo at Etna.*

## 274. WIND, WATER, AND HONOR

ne day in ancient times, it's been told, Wind, Water, and Honor gathered together one day while on a journey. They embraced one another and began talking about what they had done and what they were going to do.

Water said that a little while ago, it entered a river and did some good things by irrigating gardens, making mills move, and refreshing all those who were thirsty.

Wind, in his turn, said that it also made mills move, and without him, ships and boats could not sail the sea. And whenever he didn't have things to do, he went and amused himself with the clouds, with the trees in the middle of the forest, or with the high mountain peaks.

Honor, the poor thing, didn't have anything to say and told Wind and Water, "Certainly, I can't perform those miracles that you have done, but I hold all people in my power, and even though I am nothing and appear to be nothing, whenever a person of this world, rich or poor, has me and his acts and wishes include me, then he truly possesses a great deal."

After they had talked about similar things for a while, they agreed that they were three powers of the world, and since they had things to do, they took leave of each other, and each one of them went off to take care of its own affairs.

<sup>294</sup> The Sicilian proverb is as follows: *Lu lupu cancia lu pilu e no lu viziu.*

But just as they were separating, Wind said to Water and Honor, "When are we going to get together another time? And where?"

"You can find me in the fresh fountains," Water responded.

"And if they are dry?" Wind answered.

"Well then, you can certainly find me in the sea."

"And where can you be found?" Water asked Wind.

"When I'm free," Wind said, "you can certainly find me at the peak of Mongibello. I amuse myself there and play with the clouds and the smoke."

Then Wind and Water asked Honor: "And when we want to look for you, where are we to find you?"

"Find me? Oh no," Honor responded, "you won't be able to find me again. The way I operate, once someone loses me, he never finds me again and will never see me as long as the world exists."

*Collected by Salvatore-Pasquale Vigo at Acireale.*

## 275. FRIEND WOLF AND FRIEND FOX

Once upon a time there was a fox and a merchant who sold fresh sardines, and one time the fox pretended to get sick.

"My friend," the merchant said, "what's going on?"

"Friend, I'm sick, and I can't travel."

"Well, you know what we'll do? I'll tie you on my horse and take you to wherever you want to go, and I'll leave you there."

Behind the fox was his friend, the wolf, and the fox said to him, "Do you know what I thought. I'll ride on the merchant's horse, pick out the sardines from the barrel, and throw them to you one by one, and you'll collect them all."

In the meantime the sardine merchant placed the fox on the horse, and as they rode along, the fox threw the sardines to the wolf who caught them all. When they reached the halfway mark, the wolf said, "My friend, this is the place where I want to get off. There's my cave."

The merchant helped him off, and the fox joined the wolf.

"Friend wolf, did you manage to collect all the sardines?"

"Of course, brother fox, I've collected them all."

"Now that you've got all the sardines, it's time to share them."

"Oh!" exclaimed the wolf. "I went to so much trouble to collect the sardines, and now you want them?"

He didn't want to give him the sardines, but the fox pretended to be sick from anger.

"Oh, brother fox, what's wrong? You're not getting sick with anger because of the sardines?"

"I sure am, my friend."

"All right, I'll bring you the sardines. After all I want you to live."

So the wolf went off and brought him the sardines. After they had eaten the sardines, a merchant who sold artichokes came by.

"Brother," said the wolf, "what do you think we have to do to steal the artichokes from this merchant?"

"Do you know what we'll do?" the fox said to the wolf. "I'll pretend to be sick. He'll carry me on the saddle of the horse, and you'll walk behind. Then I'll throw you the artichokes."

When the artichoke merchant passed by, he called out, "What's wrong with you, friend fox?"

"I'm sick and can't walk to my cave. Could you give me a lift on your horse?"

"Of course, friend." And the merchant lifted him and put him on top of the sack of artichokes. Then the fox began pulling out the artichokes from the sack with his paws and threw them one by one to the wolf until they were all gone.

"Friend," the fox said to the merchant, "please let me get down. We're near my cave."

The artichoke merchant helped him down, and the fox went on his way.

"Brother wolf," said the fox, "where are the artichokes?"

"Brother fox," said the wolf, "I was so terribly hungry that I ate all of them. But to tell you the truth I saved two artichokes for you."

Though the fox was mad, he controlled himself. Then, one day he pretended to be sick, and the wolf came and asked, "Brother fox, how are you?"

"My friend, I'm sick, and I have to go to Palermo, but I can't walk."

"Don't say another word, brother fox. I'll carry you there."

He put the fox on his shoulders and began walking. The wolf became lame, and the fox began singing:

"Slowly, slowly, slowly,  
The lame one carries the healthy."<sup>295</sup>

295 *Pianu, pianu, pianu*  
E lu ruttu porta a lu sanu.

"What's going on, friend fox?" the wolf spoke.

"What should be wrong?—Can't I sing as we walk along?"

After a while, the fox began to sing again:

"Slowly, slowly, slowly,  
The lame one carries the healthy."

"Brother fox, what are you saying?"

"Nothing, my friend," said the fox. "I like to amuse myself like this."

"But how do you feel?"

"How do I feel? Still sick, and you've been able to provide relief."

"All right, let's continue walking," the wolf responded.

Some more time passed, and the fox began singing again:

"Slowly, slowly, slowly,  
The lame one carries the healthy."

"All right, brother fox. That's enough. Do you want to make a fool out of me? You're supposed to be sick and yet you sing like this!"

"Ahh," the fox said, "after I stole the artichokes, you didn't want to give me any. Now that I am well, I've made you carry me until you've become lame."

And upon saying this, he jumped free of the wolf and left him there.

*Told by Elisabetta Sanfratello at Vallelunga.*

## 276. THE KING OF THE ANIMALS, THE WOLF, AND THE FOX

**D**uring the time when the animals could speak, the lion was king and assigned the wolf to be his guard and the ass to be his secretary at the palace. When the king became sick one time, all the animals came to visit him except the fox. Since the poor king was so sick, he didn't notice the fox's absence, and none of the other animals said anything to the king about this, either out of love or fear.

But because the vile wolf could not stand the fox, he went and slyly spied on the fox so he could do him some harm. When he returned to the royal palace, he said, "Your Majesty, I've observed with wonder how all your people have come to visit your highness, but I don't know why the fox hasn't appeared one single time."

When the king heard this, he became upset by the fox and said to the wolf,

“Are you telling me the truth? Well then, what a rogue! What a miserable creature! He shall be dealt with the way he deserves!”

And he ordered the wolf to go and fetch the fox right away. After he seized him, he was to take his reward and bring him to the palace.

The wolf went at once to search for the fox in the countryside. In the meantime, the secretary, who had overheard this discussion and was ashamed of the wolf, went straight to the hare, who was his messenger and said, “I want you to do me a favor. You’re to go and find the fox quickly and tell him what I’m about to tell you.”

The hare ran as fast as he could and brought the message to the fox before the wolf got there. When the fox heard the story, he said to himself, “You spying cop of a wolf, you may be right, but I’ll secretly denounce you to the king and repay you! No doubt about it!”

Without losing any time he appeared before the king and said, “I’m at your service, your Majesty. I know that your highness has criticized me for not coming to visit you while you’ve been sick. But I want you to know, your Majesty, that I haven’t neglected my duty because I had practically broken my bones traveling from country to country for your sake, that is, to look for a good medicine for your Majesty. Finally I found the medicine, and the cure was prescribed by a great doctor. As soon as your majesty takes the medicine, you will be healed. If you don’t take it, you’ll die.”


The king was appeased by these words and asked, “What is this medicine?”

“The boiled intestines of a wolf,” the fox responded.

What was so important about the health of one of his subjects, thought the king, when it came to his own health? So, he ordered his guard to kill the wolf. As a result, the wolf was seized, his intestines taken out, boiled, and brought to the king. The king ate them and was soon as good as ever.

*Told by the fisherman Ignazio Cumella and collected by Giuseppe Patiri at Termini-Imerese.*

## 277. THE FOX

nce there was a fisherman who found a dead fox on the ground. He picked up the animal and threw him over his back. However, the fox was alive, and with his paw, he began to take the sardines that the fisherman had caught from a basket and threw them on the ground. When they were all gone, *zoom!* He jumped to the ground and escaped. All the fisherman could do was to remark, “He’s smart, and I fell for it!”

And he continued on his way, while the fox began collecting all the sardines he had thrown on the ground so that he could take them home and fry them. But he had a wolf for a neighbor who annoyed him, and he didn't know how to get rid of him. What was he to do?

"How did you manage to get these fish?" the wolf asked him.

"How?" the fox responded. "I had to use a jug. I tied it to my back, and then I jumped into the middle of the sea. Once I was far out, I pulled out the cork and went deep down to catch the fish."

"Give me one of the fish," the wolf said. "Later I want to go fishing, and I'll give you part of what I catch."

The fox said to himself, "Let's hope this will be the last time," and he gave him some fish.

That night the fox attached the jug to the wolf's back and took him to a reef.

"Now," he said to the wolf, "if you want to catch a lot of sardines, you have to swim far out into the sea, and when I give you the signal, you're to pull out the cork, and you'll see how much you'll catch."

The wolf believed him and began to swim out into the sea. Each time he turned, the fox indicated that he should keep swimming further out until he was very far. Then the fox yelled, "Now you can do it!"

The wolf popped the cork, and soon he sank and drowned. And this is how the malicious fox got rid of that rogue of a wolf.

*Told by a peasant named Giovanni Cordova at Ficarazzi.*

## 278. THE LITTLE BIRD

Once upon a time neighbor Caw-Caw, the crow, went to see the hen Cackle-Cackle and said, "Today there's going to be a grand celebration at Mount San Calogero.<sup>296</sup> I'm going. Do you want to come along?"

"Yes," replied neighbor Cackle-Cackle. "I'll gladly go with you."

So the two went on their way. They walked and walked until they met their friends, Cockadoodle, the rooster, and Pipsqueak, the little bird.

"We're going to the celebration at Mount San Calogero. If you want, you can join us."

The rooster Cockadoodle and his companion Pipsqueak said, yes, they'd

<sup>296</sup> This is a mountain near the city of Termini-Imerese.

like to, and off they all went together. Along the way Barker the dog appeared, and he was heading toward the celebration. They called to him and asked him whether he wanted to join their company.

"With pleasure," Barker the dog responded. "I'm from these parts and know the best way to get there. Come with me, and I'll show you."

He led the way, and the others followed, and soon they began climbing Mount Calogero. As time passed, it became dark, and a storm erupted. The sky roared, and there was lightning and thunder. They felt lost. All the companions, Caw-Caw, Cackle-Cackle, Cockadoodle, and Pipsqueak were depressed, and they turned to their friend Barker and cried out, "Poor us! We're all going to die!"

"Don't get discouraged! It's nothing. Don't be afraid!" their companion responded. "My friend the fox has a house nearby, and I hope that he can provide us with shelter. Run and follow me!"

They ran as fast as they could without being able to see very well, and finally they arrived at friend fox's cave.

"Knock, knock."

"Who's there?"

"It's me, friend fox," said the dog. "Would you be kind enough to provide us with shelter in your house for the night. It's pouring, and we don't have any place to go."

"Ah, padrone," the fox responded, "with regard to your companions, you are the padrone. But since my home is very fragile, and there's not much room, you'll have to stay outside, my friend."

"You don't have to think about me," the dog said. "I'll stand guard outside."

So the dog remained outside, while the others entered and took shelter in a corner of the cave.

The rain didn't stop. An hour passed, then two and three, and the more time passed, the more friend fox started to feel hungry. Finally, when it turned day, he could no longer control himself, and he turned to Caw-Caw.

"What do want me to do, my friend?" he said. "You'll have to excuse me. My appetite is getting the better of me. And the ball has fallen in your lap."

Caw-Caw began to tremble all over, and friend fox, without much ado, grabbed her and gobbled her up. After some time passed, the fox turned to Cackle-Cackle, and he said the same words that he had said to Caw-Caw.

Then Cockadoodle made his presence known and said, "How can you do this, friend fox? Do you think it's wise? You've barely finished the first, and now you want the second? Well then, I'm going to sing out loudly!"

"Don't you risk it, my friend," said the fox. "I'll lose all respect for you, and you'll be the worse off for it!"

Cockadoodle withdrew and didn't make a peep. Meanwhile, the fox said, "Two!" And he gobbled down beautiful Cackle-Cackle.

It was all wet outside, and the rain continued—the sky roared with thunderbolts and lightning. Once again, the fox's appetite grew, and he had a great desire to eat the rooster. Finally, he grabbed hold of the rooster and said, "Listen, my friend . . ."

"Stop," responded the rooster. "I know what you're going to say."

The fox held him firmly and the rooster was deadly frightened.

"Kill me," the rooster said. "Let's finish and get it over with . . ."

Cockadoodle didn't have to say this to the fox more than once who opened his mouth wide, took four bites, and cut the rooster in half.

"And now it's my turn," Pipsqueak said to himself, and he made himself as small as possible and trembled like a leaf.

The fox's appetite grew again, and he began to approach the little bird slowly but surely. The bird kept his eyes on the fox and read what was coming, "Wait, friend fox," he said. "Before you kill me, I have a favor to ask."

"What favor do you want?" the fox responded.

"I want you to kill me in a tender way so that I don't feel any pain. Here's what I want you to do: close your eyes, open your mouth very wide, and when I sit on your tongue, you're to squeeze me right away and swallow me."

"A done deal!" said the fox, and he closed his eyes, raised his head, and opened his mouth widely. The little bird fluttered his wings and flew like a bolt of lightning out of the cave. Barker the dog grabbed hold of the bird and said, "Where are you going?"

The little Pipsqueak burst into tears and told the dog the entire story. Indeed the dog listened to the entire massacre that the fox had committed.

"Don't you be afraid!" the dog said to Pipsqueak. "I'll take care of that miserable rascal!"

He put the bird down and stood guard at the mouth of the cave. In the meantime, the fox's belly was very full, and he lay down and stretched himself out very long so that the tip of his tail stuck outside the cave. Barker saw the tail and approached it, and when he was right next to it, *crack!* He bit it with his mouth and pulled the fox outside the cave. Then he got the fox by his throat and slaughtered him. Afterward, Barker and Pipsqueak left friend fox dead on the ground and went off to the city.

Along the way, the dog couldn't control the hunger he felt, and as they were

talking, he said to the bird Pipsqueak, "How hungry I am! How hungry I am! If I don't get something to eat, I'm going to eat you!"

The little bird said to himself, "How am I going to get out of this new jam?"

While Pipsqueak was thinking, a little boy approached, and he was carrying a pan filled with pasta covered with grated cheese. So what did Pipsqueak do? He flew and fluttered above the pan. The boy saw the bird and tried to slap it away, but *oops!* the pan fell with all the pasta covered with cheese, and it spilled all over the ground.

The little bird flew back quickly to the dog and said, "Go and fill yourself, while I say goodbye!"

*Told by the fisherman Ignazio Cumella and collected by Giuseppe Patiri at Termini-Imerese.*

## 279. THE WOLF AND THE CARDINAL

Once upon a time there was a cock, and he usually scraped about in a garbage heap. He scraped and scraped and found a booklet, which he opened, and there, on the very first page that he read, stood the name *King Cock*. As soon as he saw it, he began beating his wings in content. "Cockle-doodle-do! Cockle-doodle-do!"

All at once the hen came running and said, "What's all this that's making you so happy?"

"What's making me so happy?" replied the cock. "I found this booklet, and as I began reading it, the first thing I came across was *King Cock*!"

"Oh how beautiful!" exclaimed the hen. "Oh how beautiful! Can I look on with you?"

The cock turned another page and read, *Queen Hen*.

"Oh how happy I am!" the hen cried out. "Cackle, cackle, cackle!"

And she began to beat her wings.

Just then a viper passed by and said, "What's going on here that's making you all so cheerful?"

"We've found a booklet, and there's something about us printed in it."

"No fooling! Let me look at it with you."

The cock turned another page of the booklet and read, *Chambermaid Viper*.

"Really! Oh how happy I am! *Tirr! Tirr!*" and the viper began to twist her body and dance happily to celebrate the appearance of her name.

At this point a wolf passed by and asked, "What's happened that's making you celebrate this way?"

"What's making me celebrate? We've found a booklet here, and there's something about all of us printed here."

"Oh, what a curious thing! Would you mind seeing if there's anything about me?"

The cock turned the page and read, *Father Wolf the Pope!*

"Oh how fortunate, my friend! I feel very pleased. *Hoooo! Hoooo!*" And he began to jump and turn about cheerfully because he was the Pope.

Just then a cardinal came flying by and saw all four dancing with joy.

"What's making you all so joyful?" the bird asked.

"What's making us so joyful? We found a booklet about animals in this garbage heap, and the cock read what was printed there: King Cock, then after, Queen Hen, and next, Chambermaid Viper, and finally Father Wolf the Pope. This is why we're all so happy!"

"And there's nothing about me? Look and see! Look and see!"

The cock turned another page and read what was printed: *Cardinal, soldier and guardian of the castle*. Upon hearing this, the cardinal beat its wings and began singing the best song it knew with all its heart.

"What are we going to do now?" the wolf asked. "we're all here, and there's a well-bred king. You know what I say? I say that since I'm the Pope and we all want to begin a good reign, I can start by confessing all of you."

"Good idea! Good idea!" they all cried.

"You'll come into the confession booth one by one."

So they went to the confession booth, and the first one to enter was the cock (for the wolf was already seated in the confession booth). As soon as the cock entered, the wolf fell upon him, opened his mouth and . . . *Gulp!* He swallowed the King Cock. The next one to enter was the Queen Hen, and the same thing happened. He devoured her with great pleasure. Then the viper entered, and *gulp!* She made a nice bite full! The last one to enter was the cardinal who was very uneasy. He looked about him, and when he saw the feathers, he realized what they meant. "Ahh," he thought, "that's why nobody has returned from confession! Maybe the Pope has swallowed all of them, bones and all. Just wait and see how I'll accommodate you!"

So the cardinal sat down in the confession booth and said, "All right Father Pope, raise your head and open your mouth, and I'll tell you my sins."

The wolf who was hoping to swallow the cardinal, raised his head and opened his mouth, but the cardinal stuck its tail in the wolf's mouth and shat. Then it flew off singing,

“You ate the poor king and the queen,  
 Then you swallowed the viper clean.  
 And you thought the cardinal would be sweet,  
 But he gave you nothing but shit to eat.”<sup>297</sup>

The wolf stood there tricked like a fool still wondering what had happened to the cardinal that he had wanted to catch.

May the tale be long, may the tale be fine,  
 It's time to tell yours, for I'm done with mine.

*Told by Margherita Martorana, a washerwoman, to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Partinico.*

## 280. THE GRASSHOPPER AND THE ANT

Once upon a time there was a grasshopper and an ant. It was summer, and the grasshopper lay on his back, continually sang, and annoyed the people who passed by. He didn't think at all that he'd have to work to eat. In contrast, the ant went about here and there picking up a grain of wheat, a crumb of bread, and all sorts of things. Then he carried everything to a hole where he stored his provisions for the winter. When winter came, the grasshopper didn't have anything to eat and was dying of hunger. Meanwhile the ant nibbled away at the provisions that he had gathered.

“Little ant,” the grasshopper said, “please be so kind and give me something to eat. I'm so hungry that my eyes are popping out of my head.”

“No,” the ant responded. “When I was exhausting myself by gathering provisions for the winter, you were amusing yourself by singing and rubbing your belly. If you don't work, you don't eat!”

And he refused to give the grasshopper anything to eat.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina at Palermo.*

297 Re e Riggina ti manciasti,  
 Viparedda t'agghiuttisti;  
 Cardiduzzu, lu sgarrasti,  
 'Na cacata 'mmucca avisti!

## 281. KING CRYSTAL

Once upon a time there was a king and a queen who had a son. Some fairies passed by their palace and took the boy with them. The mother and father wept and were tormented. But let's leave the mother and father and turn to another father who had three daughters and didn't have enough to feed them.

The eldest daughter went to her father and said, "Father, you must go and search for my fate. I want you to go to the Signora (and she told him who it was) and ask her for a jug of wine. And then we'll see if fortune is with me."

The father did as she said, and the Signora said she would give him the wine only on the condition that he bring her some vegetables in return. So the father brought her the vegetables, and she rewarded him with the wine.

The father returned home and went to live with his daughters. Then the middle one said to him, "You've taken care of my older sister, and now you must think about my fate. I want you to go to this other Signora and ask her for a cake in my name."

The father departed with vegetables for the Signora. In return, she gave him the cake, he went back to his home, where they ate the cake, and he continued to live with his daughters. Now it was the youngest daughter who said, "Papa, now it's time for you to see my fate. I want you to go and get a few coins that we can use to do our shopping."

The father went to another Signora, and she, too, made him promise to bring her vegetables. The father was very happy and cheerful, and he went home and celebrated with his daughters, for he was glad that each one of them had found her Fate. The next day, the father went to gather the vegetables, and no sooner did he begin than a great rainstorm erupted in the countryside. Therefore, the father couldn't find the vegetables, only a cabbage head, and he began to cut it from its roots. Yet, he couldn't manage to cut it off because the roots were strong and the water was killing him. So he returned home, and his daughters asked him, "Papa, what are you doing here? Aren't you going to take the vegetables to the fate?"

"I can't gather them," he responded, "because there was a rainstorm, and the water drenched everything. The only thing I found was a cabbage head, and the roots were so hard that I couldn't cut it off. So I left and came home."

The eldest daughter began to beat the youngest daughter because she was unlucky and almost caused her father to drown. But the father said, "I don't want my daughter to be touched. She doesn't deserve a beating. Look, it's just

stopped raining. So, now I'll go and gather some vegetables and bring them to the Signora who's waiting for them."

Enough said. The father went back to the field where he found the cabbage head half cut just as he had left it. When he began cutting it off again, a cavalier appeared all of a sudden and entered the garden.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"What am I doing?" replied the poor man. "I have hungry daughters at home, and I'm gathering this cabbage head because it's the only thing I could find."

"How many daughters do you have?" asked the cavalier.

"I've got three, but they all detest one another. The two eldest have a special dislike for the youngest, and yesterday, when I couldn't cut off this cabbage head and bring it home because of the rainstorm, they beat their youngest sister saying that she almost caused me to drown."

"Well," the cavalier replied, "I want to see your youngest daughter. If you bring her to me, I'll give you some money that will serve to guarantee my word of honor."

The father took the money and the cabbage head and went home to tell his daughters what had happened. As he was walking, another rainstorm erupted, and he arrived home soaked with rain as he had been before. When the older daughters saw how soaked he was, they began hurling curses at the youngest sister and beat her again. The father felt sorry for his youngest daughter and told the two older ones to stop beating her and to leave her in peace, especially because he had found a fortune for her, and it was better than what the others two had.

"Well, what have you brought?" the older sisters asked.

"A cabbage head," said the father. "But this is no reason at all for giving your sister a beating."

"Pooh! . . . May the heavens open! What a bunch of stuff! What does this cabbage head have to do with us?"

"Just let me explain!" the father responded. "I've brought some money with me, and I want you to go shopping."

His daughters took all the money and went off immediately to do the shopping. Then they all ate and were content. After they ate, the daughters asked their father what the fortune of the youngest sister was.

"Well," responded the father, "her fortune is a rich cavalier whom I found and who will marry her and support her with chambermaids."

When the two elder sisters heard this, they broke into tears, but they were tears of jealousy even though they said it was out of love for her. Enough. The father told his youngest daughter that he had found her fortune and asked her

if she wanted him to take her to the cavalier who was waiting for her. She said yes and was happy to free herself of her sisters. So, father and daughter took their leave, and the father delivered her to the cavalier whom they found on a path in the field. The cavalier gave him a sack of money with the provision that he was never to bring his other daughters to his home. Only the father was allowed to come whenever he wanted. Right after he said this, the chambermaids led the daughter to her room in the cavalier's home, and they told her that she was never to leave the room and never to open the door to the room that was opposite hers.

"All right," she responded, "I won't open it."

That night, when she went to bed and was sleeping alone in the darkness, her husband came to lie down with her. The husband had a way of never allowing her to see his face, and this is why he came to her at night in the darkness. She heard him and didn't care about it. Then her husband just fell asleep.

The next day her father came to see his daughter and said, "How are things going? How do you feel?"

"Oh," she responded, "I feel like a princess, rich and cheerful. I have many chambermaids and am treated well. There is no one happier in the world than I am!"

"Very good! . . . Very good!" the father responded. Then he took his leave and went home to tell his other daughters all about this. When they heard how their sister was doing, they asked their father if he could bring them there, or if he could bring her to them.

"Neither one or the other," their father replied. "The cavalier told me that he never wants to see you two, and not even your sister can come here."

"But we only want to go there once."

"It can't be done. I won't say anything to the cavalier about this or to your sister."

"But ask him in our name," the sisters said.

"All right, I'll ask him, and we'll see what he says."

So the father went and asked the cavalier in the name of his daughters.

"All right," the cavalier said, "I'll give you permission only once to take your daughter to see the other two."

So the father took the youngest daughter to her sisters who made a big fuss upon seeing her and began talking about many things. In particular they wanted to know what her husband looked like. But their sister said she could not respond to this question because she had never seen him during the day, and when he came to lie down next to her in the darkness at night, she couldn't see him.

"Listen," said the eldest sister, "you know what you have to do. I'll give you this wax candle, and when he comes to lay down to sleep, light the candle, and you'll easily be able to see his face. Then you can tell us what he looks like."

However, the sister's suggestion was not sincere. Rather, she made it because she was jealous. The youngest sister understood that she suggested this so that she would lose her fortune. However, the two other sisters kept after her so much that she was finally persuaded to do it, and they made her promise that she would keep her word.

The next day the father brought his daughter back to the palace where the cavalier was living, and she went to her room. That night she lay down to sleep, and after a while the cavalier came and lay down in the bed. When he was asleep, however, his wife lit the wax candle and looked at him. He was even more handsome than she thought, and she said to herself, "Oh how handsome he is! What a handsome young man I have!" While she was in the middle of her thoughts, some of the molten wax fell on the cavalier's nose, and he felt that he was on fire, and as he was falling apart, he cried out, "Traitor! . . . Traitor!" And he arose and then sent his wife away.

The wife found herself pregnant. It was night, and she began walking for a long time until she met a hermit in the forest. He asked her what she was doing there, and she told him what had happened and how her sisters had betrayed her.

"Well," he responded, "I can't repair the damage that you've done. The only advice I can give you is to continue walking along this path and you will find another hermit much older than I am, and see what he has to say to you."

The wife continued on her way, and she encountered another hermit who asked her right away, "What are you doing here?"

"I'm walking in the forest because I have disgraced myself and don't know what to do."

Then she told the hermit what had happened, and the hermit told her there was no remedy because her fault was so great.

"Do you know what you have to do?" he said. "You must have a pair of iron boots made for you, and you must walk as far as you can walk until you reach a place where the earth is soft and the boots become worn out. Then you will see a palace that you are to enter."

The wife did as the hermit said, and she eventually arrived at the palace that he had described. Then she called out, and some servants appeared and asked her what she wanted.

"Be so kind," she said, "and let me spend the night here because I'm pregnant and don't know where to go."

The servants went to tell their mistress and King Crystal, and they

responded that she could not enter because they were still suffering as though there were a knife in their hearts ever since the fairies had taken their son. But the servants said to the king that the maiden refused to leave and was seeking their kindness. So the king and queen responded by ordering their servants to provide her with lodging, but only for one night. Consequently, the servants took her and led her to the henhouse. The maiden wanted to tell the servants all that happened to her, but they couldn't dally there very long. Instead, they went back to the queen and said, "We want you to know that the maiden wanted to tell us all about her adventures and told us that you should know about them!"

After some time passed, the maiden gave birth to a handsome baby boy. The servants went to the henhouse to give her some food, and they saw that she had given birth to a baby boy who was completely nude because the poor maiden didn't have any diapers. Immediately they went to the queen to tell her what had happened, and the queen sent some clothes for the baby, and the mother dressed him. That night when the maiden went to sleep, someone appeared to her and said, "This night you must wall up everything because three fairies will come with the king's son. Then you can bring the son to King Crystal and the queen, and they will love you very much."

Enough said. She stayed in the henhouse and began to wall up all the seams of the doors and to put out the candles. When everything was prepared, the three fairies came and brought the boy.

"This is the son of the king," they said. "We nurtured him for some time, and now you are to bring him to the king and queen."

Then the fairies departed, and they left her with the boy. The next day, the maiden arose and brought the boy to the king and queen. When the king and his family saw her carrying the boy, he embraced her affectionately and treated her kindly. After this they never let her leave the palace. They began to celebrate and amuse themselves with many festivities and many things, and they lived happily ever after.

My tale's been written, my tale's been told

Now tell your own because mine's grown old.

*Collected by Vincenzo Gialongo at Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 282. THE CURIOUS WIFE

Once upon a time, so it's been told, there was a young married man, who couldn't make a living in his village. So he went to another and took a position as handyman in the service of a priest. One time, and it was a day just like the others, he was working in the countryside, and he found a mushroom which he brought to the priest, who, in turn, asked where he had gotten the mushroom.

"I got it from a spot in the ground."

"Well, tomorrow I want you to return and dig at that spot where you found the roots of the mushroom and then bring me what you find."

The next day the handyman went to the spot and began digging until he found two vipers. He killed the vipers and then brought them to the priest, who called his servant and gave them to him to keep. Just at that time, some eels had been brought to the priest, and he took them together and said to his servant, "Give the handyman something to eat. Take two of the eels and fry them for him."

The servant, however, mixed up the eels with the vipers, because the vipers looked like the eels. So he brought the handyman the vipers, and he ate them. After he finished eating, he heard the cat talking to the dog that the priest had in his house, and the dog said, "They're supposed to give me bread."

"They're supposed to give me more than that," the cat responded.

But the dog said, "They're supposed to give me more than that because I go out with our master."

"No," the cat insisted, "It's your job to go out with the master. Whatever they give you, they should give to me. It's only fair."

The handyman was able to grasp what the animals were saying because the vipers had endowed him with the power of understanding the speech of animals. Afterward he went to the stable to give the mules their barley, and the mules heard him coming.

"He should give me more barley than you," the lead mule said, "because I carry him on my back."

"He should give me just as much as he gives you because I carry all the sacks," the other mule said.

When the handyman heard what they said, he divided the barley and gave each of them equal shares.

"You see, he did it the fair way and divided everything equally," the mule said, and the handyman went back upstairs and came across the cat, who said, "I see that you understand our speech, and I know that our master sent you to

look for the vipers and that after you found them, he asked the servant to give you something to eat, and the servant told him that you ate the vipers. Now he knows that you have the special power to understand us that he read about in a book of magic. But you must tell him that you don't understand our speech, otherwise you will die, and the master will take the special power. He will try to make you admit that you have the power, and you must refuse so that he will let you go."

After hearing this, the handyman went inside to the master. As soon as the master saw him, he began asking questions about his power, and the handyman kept denying everything so that the master had a temper fit and fired him.

So the handyman set out on his way and took the path that led to his village. Along the way he encountered a flock of sheep and their shepherds who were upset. They told him that every night a few sheep disappeared. In response the handyman said, "How much will you give me if I make sure that no more sheep will go missing?"

The head shepherd replied, "When we're certain that no more are missing, we'll give you a mare and a young mule."

That night, when it became dark and he had eaten, the handyman went to bed on some hay. At midnight he heard the wolves calling to the dogs.

"Oh, brother Vito!"<sup>298</sup>

The dogs responded, "Hey, brother Nick!"

"Can we come and get some sheep?"

"You can't come now," they answered, "there's a shepherd out on the hay."

For one week the handyman slept outside on the hay, and none of the sheep disappeared. On the eighth day he had all the big dogs killed.

"Now you can be happy," the handyman said to the shepherds. "Your sheep won't disappear anymore."

So they gave him the mare and the mule, and he went on his way. That night the wolves called out to the dogs again, "Oh brother Vito, can we come and get some sheep?"

The new little dogs responded, "No, you can't come. Your friends have been slaughtered, and if you come, you'll all be shot."

Meanwhile the handyman arrived at his home, and when his wife saw the mare and the mule, she asked him whose animals they were.

"They're ours," her husband said.

Now it so happened that there was a fair taking place in a nearby village, and

298 St. Vito is the patron saint and protector of dogs.

it seemed to the handyman just the right moment to go and celebrate with his wife. They both got on top of the mare and set off. The mule followed and cried out to its mother to wait for him, and the mother replied, "Come on, faster. You've got nothing to carry, and I have two people on my back!"

When the handyman heard this, he burst out laughing, and his wife became curious and asked, "Why are you laughing?"

"Nothing at all," he replied.

"You better tell me, otherwise I won't go on to the fair."

"I'll tell you when we arrive at the church where the fair is," her husband responded.

They continued on their way, and as soon as they arrived at the church, his wife began again, "Why did you laugh? Now you've got to tell me."

"When we get back home, I'll tell you," the husband said.

The wife decided to return home without going to the fair, and so they turned around and went back home. As soon as they arrived, the wife began again.

"Now you've got to tell me!"

"Go and fetch the priest for me, and I'll tell you afterward," the husband replied.

Quickly the wife put on her veil and went to get the priest and told him that he would have to come immediately to confess her husband. In the meantime, the husband was alone, he picked up a handful of grains and threw them to the hens and rooster. The hens fluttered about to eat the grain, but the rooster flapped his wings and drove them away because he didn't want them to eat. The husband turned to the rooster and asked, "Why didn't you let the hens eat?"

"I don't let them eat because I'm the rooster, and I'm completely free to sing as I want, unlike you, because once you confess everything to your wife, you'll die."

The husband began thinking about this and said to the rooster, "You have more sense than I do!"

So what did he do? The husband took off his belt and moistened it until it was flexible. When his wife returned, she announced, "The priest is on his way. Now you've got to tell me!"

Instead the husband took his belt and began whipping her until she was more dead than alive. Then the priest arrived and asked him if he wanted to be confessed.

"Who told you that I wanted to be confessed?"

"Your wife."

"She needs the confessing," the husband said, "not me."

The priest approached the wife, but she didn't say a thing, and the priest realized that things were not right. So he turned away without saying anything and left. After a while the husband went to her and said, "Do you still want to hear what I was supposed to tell you, wife? Shame on you."

"There's nothing I want to know," she responded.

And this is how his wife stopped being curious.

*Told by Rosario Di Liberto, miner, and collected by Gaetano Di Giovanni at Cianciana.*

## 283. THE STEPMOTHER

There was once a husband and wife, so it is told, and they had a daughter and son. The wife died, and the husband remarried and took a woman who had a daughter with a blind eye. The husband was a farmer and went to work in a field. The stepmother couldn't stand her husband's two children, and in order to get rid of them, she baked some bread and told them to take it to her husband, but she directed them to the wrong field so that they would get lost. When they reached a certain spot, it was already night, and they began to call for their father, but nobody responded. The brother was thirsty, and when they found a spring, he wanted to drink some of the water, but his sister, who was under a magic spell, said, "Don't drink from this spring, or you'll turn into an ass."

Then they came across another spring, and the boy wanted to drink. Once again, however, his sister said, "Don't drink the water, or you'll turn into a calf."

The brother didn't listen, and he became a calf with golden horns. Then they continued to walk, and they arrived at the seashore where there was a beautiful villa that belonged to a prince. When the prince saw them, he called to the girl (for he saw how beautiful she was), and asked her to become his wife. After the marriage he asked her why she kept the calf, and she replied, "I love this calf because I raised it."

Now let's return to the father who had been grieving since the loss of his children, and to divert himself one day he went out into the fields to gather fennel. After wandering a great deal he arrived at the villa, where his daughter was now living with the king. She happened to be looking out the window and said to him, "My friend, come up here."

Indeed, his daughter had recognized him, and when he was before her, she asked, "Don't you recognize me, my friend?"

"No, I don't recognize you."

"I'm your daughter," she responded. "You must have thought that you had lost me for good."

Upon saying this, she threw herself at his feet and said, "Pardon me, dear father. By chance I came to this villa, and the king's son wanted to marry me."

The father was very consoled to find that his daughter had made such a good marriage.

"Now, my dear father," she said, "I want you to empty the sack of fennel, and I'll fill it with money."

And then she begged him to return home and bring back his wife and the daughter with a blind eye. So her father went back to his house with the sack filled with money, and his wife was frightened by this and asked, "Who gave you all this money?"

"Oh, my wife," he replied, "guess what? I found my daughter, and she's the wife of a king, and she gave me all this money!"

Instead of being consoled, his wife became sad upon hearing that her stepdaughter was still alive. However, she said to her husband, "I want to go there and bring my daughter, too." (She meant the one who had one eye blind.)

So all three departed, husband, wife, and the daughter with the blind eye. When they arrived, the husband's daughter was happy to see her stepmother. But once the stepmother realized that the king was not at home and that she was alone with her stepdaughter, she grabbed her and threw her out the window into the sea. And what do you think she did after that? Well, she took her daughter with the blind eye, dressed her in the stepdaughter's clothes, and said, "When the king returns and finds you weeping, you're to say, 'the little calf blinded me with his horn, and I only have one eye now.'"

Then the stepmother returned to her home. Soon after the king arrived and found the daughter in bed weeping. So he asked, "Why are you crying?"

"The little calf poked out my eye with his horn."

Immediately the king cried out to his servants, "Go and summon the butcher to slaughter the calf!"

When the little calf heard that he was to be killed, he ran to the balcony and called out to his sister in the sea:

"Oh sister, my sister, drowned in the sea,  
They're sharpening their knives for my slaughter.  
Once they kill me, they'll boil a kettle of water  
And they'll hold a grand feast just to eat me!"<sup>299</sup>

299 Oh! Suruzza anedda anedda,  
Pri mia si scarfa l'acqua,  
E s'ammolanu li cutedda

Upon hearing this, his sister responded:

“Oh brother, my brother, there’s nothing I can do now to help you.  
I’m stuck in the jaws of a shark, and afraid he’ll soon start to chew!”<sup>300</sup>

When the king heard the calf utter these words, he went to the window, and when he saw his wife in the sea, he called two sailors, and they fetched her from the jaws of the fish and revived her. Then the king ordered the girl with the blind eye to be killed and chopped into pieces and salted like tuna fish. Afterward he sent the pieces to the stepmother.

When the stepmother received the gift, she said to her neighbors, “Look at what my daughter the princess has sent to me!”

And she shared the pieces of meat with her neighbors and began to eat. The stepmother had a cat that began to meow and said, “Give me a little bit, and I’ll tell you something.”

“Oh my nasty little cat, what do you have to tell me?”

“This is the flesh of your daughter with the blind eye,” the cat responded.

The stepmother began to search the barrel and found her daughter’s head and her hands, and she was now convinced that it was her daughter’s flesh. So she ran to her neighbors and cried out, “Throw up all that meat you’ve eaten! It’s the flesh of my daughter with the blind eye!”

When her husband saw all that was happening, he went to his daughter in the villa to find out the truth, and his daughter told him the reason why everything had happened. Realizing that his daughter was right, he abandoned his treacherous wife and remained with his daughter.

*Told by Vincenza Giuliano, weaver, and collected by Vincenzo Di Giovanni at Casteltermini.*

## 284. THE HERMIT

Once there was a certain hermit who lived on a mountain and ate nothing but wild grass and fruit. There happened to be a flock of sheep nearby, and he gradually developed a friendship with the shepherds. So, the steward, who was their overseer, began bringing him small portions of ricotta and bread so that the hermit was quite well fed. Now, these shepherds kept mares, and the stable master had a horse and a donkey. And so

300 Oh! Fratuzzu, 'un t'haju chi fari,  
Sugnu 'mmucca di lu pisci-cani.

the good hermit decided to give them the benefit of his holy powers by blessing the mares, seeing to it that those who were to produce mules produced mules and those who were to produce colts produced colts. He also blessed the sheep so that they produced more cheese and ricotta. As a result of all this, the shepherds regarded the hermit as a saint.

Now let's leave the hermit and go to the steward, who was getting on in years and decided to take a wife. The bride he chose was a beautiful young woman whose father belonged to the lowest level of the gentleman class. Well, given that the steward was elderly and didn't come to town often, his new wife began cheating on him. When the steward realized what was happening, he thought, "I'll bring her to the mountain pasture and have her blessed by the hermit, and that will drive all the temptation out of her."

Their arrival set the shepherds to talking among themselves, wondering what was going on. But the steward immediately called for the hermit, who appeared looking very devout and praising God and the saints as he approached.

"Go kiss his hands!" the steward said to his wife.

The hermit was very reluctant to have her kiss his hand, and the very touch of the steward's wife felt as though he had stuck his hand in a wasps' nest. His flesh tingled as if ants were crawling over it, and he turned to the steward and said, "You must be keeping mares here, since I feel horseflies all over my body."

And he began scratching himself all over, especially down his back.

"Ah," said the steward, "this is the effect of your holiness. Now you must bless her head."

The hermit blessed the woman's head, and he felt a greater itching than even before. "Now my back is itching more terribly than you can imagine!"

At this point the steward said to his wife, "Put your hands under his shirt and scratch his back," and the woman did this.

The man believed that the more his wife touched the hermit, the more blessings she would receive. But when the hermit felt his back being touched, he flew into a rage and went to seize the woman. She immediately began running from him, and he began running after her. When the steward saw how angry the hermit had become, he said to the shepherds and the stable master, "Run after them, all of you! I'm too old to catch them! Take some ropes with you, and when you get ahead of them, grab him and tie him up!"

And so they ran after them, over hills and dales, the hermit chasing the woman, and the shepherds always behind them. When the shepherds and the stable master found themselves in a mountain pass and saw that the steward was far behind them, they sat down to rest, feeling too tired to run any

further. But eventually the steward caught up with them and urged them to resume the chase.

"Where are they now?" he demanded.

"On the other side of the valley."

"And what are they doing?"

"What are they doing?" answered the shepherds. "Why, now they've mounted the mares and are riding away!"

Meanwhile, the holy hermit rode off in a different direction than the steward's wife, and he stopped pursuing her. But the shepherds kept pursuing him, intent on tying him up with the rope. The hermit slipped and fell but immediately managed to get to his feet and flee even more swiftly up the mountain so that the shepherds finally had to give up the chase. They slowly made their way back to the pasture, aching in all their limbs.<sup>301</sup> And as for that poor old steward, he was staggering to the left and to the right, barely able to drag himself back to where the others were.

And so you see what kind of blessing they received from the holy hermit!  
*Collected by Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

## 285. THE LOVELY MAIDEN

**H**ere's another one of those tales told time and again.

There was once a merchant who had an exceptionally lovely daughter, more beautiful than any maiden the world had ever seen, and he loved her very much. This merchant kept his shop in the center of the piazza, while his private residence was on a street away from the piazza. This father's love for his daughter was so great that he couldn't let an hour go by without closing his shop and going home to see her.

Well, it happened one day that an artist entered the man's shop and bought some canvasses for painting portraits. The merchant couldn't help asking the artist, "My good fellow, you must paint a certain portrait for me, and you must paint it perfectly." With these words he led the artist to his home and into his daughter's presence. "Here," he said, picking up his tobacco box, "you must paint her portrait on the lid of this tobacco box."

What the artist did was to paint not one but two portraits, one on the tobacco lid as requested and another on a canvas, which he secretly kept for

301 The Sicilian is more extreme, saying literally "with ruptured hips" (*cu l'anchi stuccati*).

himself. The merchant paid the man handsomely for his work, and the painter went off to his own city. Having returned there, he resumed his practice of setting up the portraits he had painted outside his studio. At that very moment a king's son was passing by and saw the portraits. He stopped the carriage and stared straight at the portrait of the merchant's daughter. Then he returned to his palace and immediately sent for the painter.

"I must know where this portrait comes from," he said.

"In the town of Casteltermini," replied the painter, "there is a merchant whose daughter is the most beautiful creature my eyes have ever seen, and her name is Tarisina."

Hearing this, the king's son immediately went to Casteltermini and rented a big house opposite the house of the merchant so that he could speak with the young maiden. He spent the whole day on his balcony, and eventually he succeeded in conversing with her a little, and then a bit more, and finally things reached the point where he told her he wanted to marry her.

"That's impossible," came her answer. "My father hasn't even decided that it's time for me to marry."

"Well, in that case," replied the young prince, "why don't we simply elope? And here's the way to do it. You just make up a bundle of the clothing you need, and tonight, at midnight, stand in your doorway, and I'll come get you. We'll take some horses and ride off together to my own city."

Now, Tarasina was a very spirited young woman, and so she agreed to the plan. When midnight arrived, she was ready with a bundle of her belongings, which included a bottle of drugged wine. She was ready and waiting in her doorway when, by a terrible piece of bad luck, a bandit happened to come by riding a mare, and the young woman, mistaking him for the prince's son, cried out, "Here I am!"

The bandit didn't hesitate a second but immediately swooped her up without saying a word, and after mounting her on his horse, he rode off with her.

It was only by the light of dawn that the maiden realized that this was not the young prince. In her desperation she began sobbing, but the bandit took her deep into the woods where he ordered her to dismount. Now, this maiden was very clever, and so she said to the bandit, "I'm feeling weak from hunger. Can we have a meal?"

The bandit agreed, and they sat down to eat. As soon as the bandit drank the bottle of wine she had carried with her, he fell into a deep sleep. Tarasina quickly removed his clothing and put it on, mounted the horse, and, looking just like a man, she rode off to Messina—which was the city where the young prince's father lived.

Once in Messina, she began asking people where the king lived. She

soon found his palace, went up the steps, and addressed the first servant she met.

"My good fellow, would you do me the favor of announcing to the king that if he needs a secretary, I am here to serve him."

The servant went and asked the king, who said yes. When the king saw this new secretary, he was struck by his good looks and fine complexion, and he gave him a nice desk to do his writing.

Now let's leave the secretary at his writing desk and go back to the young prince. When he arrived at the maiden's doorway and didn't find her there, he shouted, "I've been betrayed! It must have been her father who tricked me!"

Meanwhile, the father had discovered that his beloved daughter was missing, and he was looking everywhere with no success. As for the prince, he was in a state of total despair and went back to his city of Messina, where he fell into a deep depression, refusing to speak to anyone or to leave the palace.

Now the old king was growing very concerned about his son's condition, so he asked some of the young prince's friends to take him out for a walk to cheer him up. When they took him for a stroll down by the harbor, they found a man sitting on a rock with his head drooping. The young prince looked at him and asked, "My friend, why so glum?"

"Oh, sir," came the answer, "if you knew the depth of my anger, it would drive you mad."

"And if you only knew my bad luck," responded the prince, "you'd see it is worse than yours. But first, tell me what is troubling you"

"I was in Casteltermini," replied the man, "and was riding down a certain street when I saw a beautiful woman. I seized her and took her into the woods, but then she drugged me. When I woke up, I found she was gone, so was my horse, and I was completely nude."

Hearing these words, the young prince took out his knife, killed the man, and threw him into the sea. When his friends saw him commit this murder, they quickly took hold of him and brought him back to the palace, where he returned to his own room.

Meanwhile, his father had decided to introduce his son to the new secretary, and the disguised maiden recognized the young prince without herself being recognized, thanks to her disguise. When she was alone with the king, she said,

"Your majesty, I see your son is suffering from an incurable pain which will not go away. But I know a remedy that will cure him of his melancholy."

"And what would that be?" replied the prince.

"Your son was in love with a young maiden, but she disappeared, and he was unable to find her again. But I know where she is."

The king immediately ran to his son and said, “My boy, our secretary understands the cause of your melancholy.”

Then he returned to the secretary, who said to him, “If you give me a month’s time, I will be able to bring that young woman here to your palace.”

“If you can do this,” replied the king, “I shall promote you to a position of much higher rank.”

When a month’s time had passed, the king called his son and said, “The month is over. Tomorrow we’re going to invite all our relatives and friends, and when your fiancée arrives, you’ll be married in a big, festive event.”

The guests were invited, the secretary dressed herself in the same clothes she had when she left her father’s house, and then she came forth and said to them, “Here is your Tarasina.”

The young prince couldn’t believe his eyes and hugged her tightly. Once they were married, they remained happy and content.

*Told by Vincenzo Midulla to Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermeni.*

## 286. THE DROPPED SPINDLE

Once upon a time, so the story goes, there was a mother known as old Paula, a poor, unfortunate widow, who had four daughters. Their names were Catarina, Viticchia, Rosa, and Maricchia, and they supported themselves by their own labor, living in a simple house. Their mother kept her daughters safe by locking them inside the house whenever she went forth looking for whatever work she could find. She collected material for spinning and weaving—flax, tow, cotton and linen—and would bring it all home where her daughters worked day and night.

Well, one Sunday, the youngest daughter decided not to attend church with her sisters, and so she remained locked in the house. Although it was a day of rest, she was working, sitting at her window and spinning, while she watched all the people passing by on her street. At one point she happened to drop her spindle, but since nobody walked by her window, she could not be helped. Eventually, however, a fine gentleman came along, and the maiden said to herself, “Is this good luck or bad?”<sup>302</sup> Then she turned to the gentleman and said,

302 The Sicilian says, “Oh, destiny, Oh, death!” which makes no sense in English, so we have used a translation that suits the context. But note that the word “destiny” is significant in what is to follow.

"Oh, kind gentleman that you are, would you please pick up my spindle?"

"Can't you come down and get it yourself?" he asked.

"No," she replied. "I'm locked in the house."

"And why is it that you're locked in?"

"Because my mother and sisters have gone to church, but I wanted to stay here and finish the work I still have from the past week. I also had a plan to watch everyone passing by and to test my destiny by dropping my spindle and seeing who might pick it up. Whoever picks up my spindle, I decided, would be destined to become my husband, and that way I'd be relieved of this work I have to do all day and night."

"Well," replied the gentleman, "what an amazing coincidence this is! I left my house last night because I couldn't rest, and my mother said to me, 'Go out and find what you're missing.' So then, since it really is our destiny to become man and wife, here's what we'll do. I'll keep your spindle, and when your mother returns, I'll personally hand it to her."

"Oh, no," replied the maiden. "I don't want my mother to find out that I was working on a Sunday, spinning at my window. Instead, let's do the following. I'll lower a thread, and you can attach the spindle to it. Then, when my mother returns, you can decide how to handle things."

But as they were talking, the maiden saw her mother and sisters coming back from church.

"Oh, look!" she said to the gentleman. "My mother and sisters are coming!" And with these words she withdrew from the window. The gentleman presented himself to the mother with the following words.

"My good madam, I picked up your daughter's spindle when she dropped it, and then she said to me, 'Whoever picks up my spindle is to be my husband.' For my own part, I find no problem with this. So why don't you accompany me to my own house and listen to my intentions without feeling that you have to commit yourself to anything right now."

"Oh," replied the mother, "how can it be that you wish to marry the daughter of a poor woman like me who has no worldly possessions?"

"Don't worry about all that. Just come with me, and I'll take care of everything."

So old Paula accompanied him back to his house, and when they got there, he said, "Now you must wait here at the door while I go upstairs. I'll send you down a big purse full of money, which you can use to buy new dresses for yourself and your daughters and to rent a nice house. Then I'll have my father and mother pay you a visit."

And so he went upstairs and sent down the money, and old Paula returned home feeling very happy.

As soon as she was home, she went to her daughter and asked,  
 “Maricchia, tell your mother how all this came about.”

When the maiden told her the whole story of what had happened, old Paula handed her the purse and said, “Here, my dear Maricchia, this money is all yours to spend, because it is your own destiny.”

The young maiden danced and skipped with delight at hearing these words, and then she said, “Mother dear, let’s go now and get Catarina, Viticchia, and Rosa, and then we’ll go to church and give thanks to the Lord. Afterward, we’ll go to a fine clothier’s shop and get ourselves new dresses and whatever else we need.”

And so that’s what they did. They went directly from church to the shop of the finest clothier in town.

“What would you like?” asked the proprietor.

“We want the very best dresses in your shop,” answered Maricchia.

“And who would they be for?”

“They’d be for me myself.”

“And how can you pay for so many purchases?”

“No need to worry about that,” said Maricchia. “There’s always a blessing just around the corner.<sup>303</sup> Please bring us the dresses, and then you’ll see.”

But the shop owner, hearing these words, could only think to himself, “Who knows how long this little charade will go on? I’ll end up by taking half of my merchandise off the shelves, and nothing to show for it in the end.”

But he went ahead and took down the finest dresses in his shop. Maricchia was very happy to try them all on, turning this way and that, her face pink and glowing, and saying things like “This one doesn’t appeal to me,” “I don’t care for this one either,” and so on. Finally, after much searching, she pulled out a dress and said, “This will look good on Catarina, and this one will be fine for Rosa, and look, mother, how beautiful this one is—it will be pretty as a picture on Viticchia.”

And now Maricchia had lost herself completely amongst all the fine clothes, as she turned this way and that way and went through everything in the shop. The shopkeeper, however, had grown impatient with how much time this was taking, which kept him from serving other customers, and so he said, “My dear young lady, could you please hurry up, because I have other business to attend to.”

Maricchia replied that she too had many dresses to try on and that she

303 This is a proverb that we have translated with an idiomatic English equivalent. Its full meaning, Pitre tells us, is “virtue is not commonly found, and it’s a blessing where it exists.” The Sicilian is *a pocu banni stannu li virtù*, literally “virtues are (found) in few places.”

came first and the other customers would have to wait. The long and short of it was that the mother and daughter chose a dress of Turkish linen for Maricchia, one of wool for Catarina, one of velvet for Viticchia, a dress of fine muslin for Rosa, and a dark dress for the mother. Then they selected five swatches of the finest cloth, five swatches of muslin, and five silk handkerchiefs. When all their choices were made, the clothier added up their bill, and it came to twenty gold coins. The young maiden cheerfully counted out the twenty coins, and they all gathered up their purchases and went home in a festive mood. As soon as they were home they summoned the dressmaker and gave her the material to be sewn, and in no time at all everything was ready. Then they called the shoemaker and had him make pretty shoes with ribbons on them. Next they went to look at a house that was for rent, a fine mansion belonging to a baroness, and they decided to take it. As for the rent, because the year was already half over, they managed to get a good price at twenty-four gold pieces.

Their next stop was at a goldsmith's shop, where they selected pearl earrings, rings, and necklaces for each person. They also found a fine diamond for the bride, and the cost of all these items together came to sixty gold pieces.

Now all this purchasing of jewelry and clothing stirred up quite a reaction among the merchants and the neighbors, who began murmuring to each other, "Old Paula is keeping secrets from us. 'There's something afoot in the palace!'"<sup>304</sup> But try as they might to find out the truth behind her actions, they couldn't come up with anything that would damage the reputation of Paula and her daughters because they had always been the incarnation of virtue.

Once they had prepared everything they needed, all five of the women set off on a Sunday for the new house they had rented, dressed in all their finery, with hair perfectly brushed and combed. Now, up to this moment the intended groom had not spoken a word to his father and mother about all these behind-the-scene arrangements. But, when he saw Maricchia with her mother and sisters stroll past his house, dressed to the nines, as they say,<sup>305</sup> he pretended that he didn't know her. Instead, he called his mother to the window and exclaimed, "Mother, oh, mother! Come and see what a beautiful young maiden is walking by! She gave me a glance and a friendly smile, and she could very well be the bride I've been waiting for."

"Then send for her, my son!" replied his mother.

304 Pitrè explains that this is a proverbial phrase—*chi nova cc'è 'n palazzu*—adapted from a longer, well-known proverb used to comment on unwelcome departures from the norm.

305 The Sicilian expression is unusual, literally "dressed in orange-tree leaves," *vistuti 'n pampina d'aranciu*. Pitrè comments that the idiom "has the flavor of the Middle East."

And so they sent their servant Raffaeli to find out where this family lived. He quickly found their house and returned to tell his mistress that this family lived in a palatial mansion, which they had recently occupied. So now the gentleman wrote a letter in which he stated that he wished to propose marriage to the young woman, and that her family should be ready to make the acquaintance of his father and mother. He also secretly slipped a diamond into the letter, as a gift for his fiancée. When Maricchia opened this letter, she couldn't contain herself, leaping and dancing for joy. She sent back a letter in which she enclosed the diamond she had bought. The intended groom was waiting for a return letter, and the instant he opened it and found the diamond, he put it on his finger and was almost out of his mind with happiness. As for his parents, when they learned what a palatial mansion the fiancée's family lived in, they concluded that she must belong to the nobility. That very evening, they went with their son to make the acquaintance of his fiancée, riding in their carriage and accompanied by their full staff of servants.

The groom brought many fine gifts: a pair of bracelets, a pendant, necklaces, and other fine objects. Maricchia and her family received their guests, and since the meeting went exceptionally well, they decided that very evening to set a date for the wedding. After some discussion, the gentleman turned to his parents and said, "Mother and father, I would like to bring this matter to a close as soon as possible. I couldn't bear to have one of those long engagements that take up half a lifetime. I propose that we wait until Lent and Advent have passed, and then during Carnival season we can have a fine wedding celebration."

"Fine! A wonderful plan!" they all agreed. But Maricchia wasn't completely happy with this, because the delay seemed rather long to her. But then she reflected on how much time she would need to prepare her trousseau, and she found she was quite happy to go along with the general agreement. And so, to make a long story short, when the date arrived, on the final day of Carnival, the two young people were married, with a grand wedding party, an elaborate banquet, handsome carriages, and all the rest.

So they lived on, happy and content,  
While we sit here without a cent.

*Told by Anna Maltese to Salvatore Struppa in Marsala.*

## 287. THE FAITHFUL LITTLE HORSE

**H**ere's another tale told time and again.

Once there was a prince who had an only daughter named Mariuzza, and he decided it was time for her to marry.

"If I am to be married, you must make a public announcement of the fact," she said.

So the prince did this, and soon a host of princes and cavaliers presented themselves as suitors. They all sat down for a banquet, and the princess looked them over. There was one she didn't like because he had a crooked mouth, and another because of some similar defect. There was another that she rejected because he had a mulberry mark on his neck and a feather on his rear end. And so Mariuzza took her father aside and told him that not a single one was acceptable, and that there was even one who had a mulberry mark on his neck and a feather growing out of his behind.

"Go and have a second look," her father told her, "There must be someone here that you like well enough."

So she went back for another look and, finally, she found a suitor she liked and they were wed. Now, Mariuzza had a little horse she was very fond of, and every evening she would go down to the stables to feed him. That evening she found him in tears. So she asked him why he was crying.

"I'm crying because the person you married is someone who must spend seven years as a human and seven years as an animal. Therefore, I'll give you two apples, a red one and a yellow one. Give him the red one to eat, then dress yourself in men's clothes and come back here to me."

So she went back up to the palace, gave her husband the red apple, which he ate and promptly fainted. Then she went back down to her little horse.

"Get up on my back," he said. "I have somewhere to take you."

And so she mounted, and he carried her to another city.

"Now dismount here," said the horse, "go to the king's palace, and ask if they will hire you as a servant. Tell them your name is Don Pippino."

So Mariuzza did this and the king hired her.

Now this king had a son, who said to his father one day, "Father, this Don Pippino looks to me like a woman."

"Well," replied the king, "tomorrow you can take him to a silversmith's shop, and then notice what he chooses."

That evening Mariuzza went to see how her little horse was doing.

"Listen," said the horse. "Tomorrow the king's son is going to take you to a

silversmith's shop to find out if you are a woman. Be sure to choose a man's ring."

The next morning the king's son said, "Don Pippino, let's go visit the silversmith." So they went together, and as soon as they entered, he said, "Please choose whatever you like."

"Do you take me for a woman," said Mariuzza, "showing me things like this? Instead, I'll take this simple ring."

Back at the palace, the young prince said to the king, "Father, he took nothing but a simple ring."

"Didn't I tell you he was a man?" replied the king.

But the prince could only reply, "Oh, father, I'm sure he's a woman."

Such a delicate hand, such fingers long and fine,  
And a lovely face—I'll die if I can't make her mine."

And with these words, he burst into tears.

"All right, then," said the king. "Tomorrow, take him into the larder, and if he faints from all the smell, that proves he's a woman."<sup>306</sup>

So the next morning, the prince said, "Don Pippino, let's go out for a walk," and he took her straight to the larder.

Mariuzza didn't want to enter but she had no choice, and as soon as she was inside, she fainted. The prince called his father, and at once they carried her back to the palace. There the queen changed her clothing and dressed her as a woman, and Mariuzza and the prince were soon married.

Before long, the new princess became pregnant. Now it turned out that the prince was obliged to go off to war, and so he said to his mother, "Mother, you must take good care of my wife in my absence, and as soon as the child is born, you must send me a messenger with the news."

Eventually the child was born and the queen sent the messenger. This man took a road that led through some woods, and soon he came upon a handsome palace. He sat down to rest in the entryway, and out came a serpent who addressed him, saying,

"What are you doing on this road?"

"The queen's daughter-in-law had a baby boy and I'm taking the news to the prince."

"Then you can spend the night here," said the serpent, and he offered the man dinner.

306 This notion may seem strange to modern readers, but we must imagine how strong the odors would be from all the meat, cheese, and other foods stored in a closed space before refrigeration was invented (think of prosciutto, salami, provolone, parmiggiano, olives, etc).

After the messenger had gone to sleep, the serpent searched his pouch, found the letter and read it, and then put it back again. The next morning, as the messenger was preparing to leave, the serpent said, "On your way back you must be sure to stop here again."

And so the messenger went on his way, and on his return journey he stopped again at this place, where again the serpent gave him dinner and a bed for the night. But this time he took out the letter and replaced it with a false one he had written, filled with all kinds of bad things about Mariuzza, saying she deserved to be burned to death and urging the king and queen to banish her and her child from the palace.

The following day, when the messenger delivered this letter, the king and queen were appalled.

"Why is our son so angry at his wife?" asked the king. "Perhaps it will be better to make no mention of this letter."

But Mariuzza kept asking whether any letter had come back from her husband, and so finally they had to show it to her.

"All right, then," she said. "Since my husband wishes to throw me out, I will leave."

"Why should you leave when you've done nothing wrong?" answered the queen. "This must be a trick."

But that very night Mariuzza took her child and her little horse and left the palace, making her way eventually to the same woods where the serpent lived. She came to the palace, sat down on the foot of the stairs, and heaved a big sigh. The serpent heard her and invited her inside.

"Won't you come in, my friend?" he said.

"All right, if only you'll promise not to harm my child. You can do with me as you like."

As soon as she was inside, he shut her in the most remote room in the palace.

"You're the one who gave me the apple that made me faint!" her former husband exclaimed, and then he ordered his servants heat up a big furnace, intending to burn her to death in it. To get away from there, Mariuzza had to pass through seven rooms. She went to the window of the first room and cried out, "Little horse of mine, help me! I need your help now!" She went from window to window calling out in the same way, until finally at the seventh window the little horse appeared and challenged the serpent:

"Before you attempt to burn my mistress, you'll have to deal with me! It's a duel to the death!"

And the little horse killed the serpent just like that.

Meanwhile, the prince had returned from the war to his parents' palace, and he asked, "Mother, where are Mariuzza and my son?"

"Well, what about the letter you wrote?" she asked. And she told him what the letter had said.

"Oh, we've been tricked!" he exclaimed, and he was so upset that he thought of killing himself. But a bit later, to raise his spirits, his friends took him out to the woods to hunt, and when it began to rain, they took shelter inside the palace. His wife was there and, seeing him enter, she said to their little boy, "See there, that's your father. Go now and kiss his hand."

The child did this, and his father recognized him at once. "Bring your mother to me," he said, and out came Mariuzza. Then they returned all together to the royal palace.

So as husband and wife, their life was complete,

While we have to live without shoes on our feet.

*Told by the 12-year-old Rosa Picilli, daughter of the chief sulfur miner Francesco Picilli, to Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

## 288. THE LITTLE DOLL

**H**ere's a tale for you, gentlemen, that's been told time and again.

Once there was a poor widow with three daughters, two of them just entering young womanhood and the third still a child. This poor family had no way of earning a living except by their spinning wheels. When they got something to spin, they were able to eat. Otherwise, they were so destitute that they did not want to show their faces in public.

Well, one day the mother said to her youngest daughter—let's call her Ninetta—"Ninetta, I want you to go to the woman who gives us things to spin. Tell her that we have nothing to eat and need a small advance, which we'll deduct from her next account. Then take the money and buy us a loaf of bread, so that we have something to eat."

So Ninetta got the money and was on her way to buy the bread, when she happened to meet an old woman.

"You there," said the old woman. "If you give me that money, I'll give you this little doll in exchange."

As soon as Ninetta saw that pretty little doll, elegantly dressed with a tiny white apron that was an absolute joy to behold, she forgot all about the bread she was supposed to buy.

"All right," she said. "Here's the money. Now, let me have the doll."

So she got the little doll and brought it home to her mother.

"Ah, there you are!" exclaimed her mother. "Did you buy the bread?"

"No," replied Ninetta. "I met an old woman, and she sold me this little doll. Look at how beautiful it is!"

"Oh, you little scamp!" her mother and sisters all shouted with one voice. "How could you do such a thing? Don't you realize that we've had nothing to eat all day? Our stomachs are as empty as if we've been fasting to receive communion, and now we still have nothing to eat!"

And with these words they began beating poor Ninetta.

"Get out!" they screamed. "Leave this house at once, you and your doll! We can't stand the sight of you. Let hunger and cold teach you a lesson about your craving for dolls!"

And with this they shoved and kicked her out of the house and shut the door. Ninetta sat down on her front steps holding the doll tightly against herself and burst into tears. Then, because an icy cold wind was blowing that felt as if it could cut your face, she curled up in a ball and protected the little doll securely inside a fold of her apron. A little time passed, and then the doll spoke.

"Mamma, I have to make doo-doo!"

"Go ahead and do it," answered Ninetta.

And the little doll filled her apron with gold coins.

Then, a short while later, the little doll cried out once more,

"Mamma, I have to make doo-doo!"

"Go ahead," said Ninetta. And out came another apron-load of gold coins.

Well, to make a long story short, the little doll did this so many times that all the front steps and the area in front of the house became covered with gold.

Ninetta began calling in a loud voice, "Mother! Mother! Open the door right away! You'll be glad you did."

At first her mother and sisters pretended not to hear her, and then they said no to her request, but finally, when she kept calling, they said to themselves, "All right, let's open the door and see what all this shouting is about. We still don't have to let her back in the house."

So they opened the front door and a great pile of coins poured into the house.

"Oh! What a sum of money! Who was it that gave you all these coins?"

"It was the doo-doo that my little doll made."

"Well, then, come right in, and we'll take your doll and put her in a bed all nice and clean."

And so they gathered all the money and took the little doll and put her in a bed. Every few minutes the little doll said, "I have to make doo-doo, I have to make doo-doo," and she filled the bed with so much money that they didn't know where to put it all. The following day, the mother went and bought a great big house, a carriage and horses, and all the fine things that money can buy, and thus she became the wealthiest lady in town.

Now, Ninetta's mother had a neighbor who had known her during all the time she was dirt poor and starving, without a penny to her name, and this woman couldn't accept the fact that the mother had become so rich. So one day she called Ninetta and said to her,

"Tell me, how did it happen that you all became so wealthy all at once?"

"Do you want to know?" replied Ninetta. "I bought a little doll, and every time this doll makes doo-doo, it's all in the form of gold coins."

"Do you still have this doll?"

"Oh, yes. But since we now have more money than we know what to do with, we took the doll and put her at the bottom of a big old chest, the one that stands in our living room, and that's where we keep her because we don't have any need for her now."

As soon as the neighbor heard all this, she went to her husband and told him the whole story, and together they plotted how they could get hold of the little doll and become rich themselves. And then what do you think they did? That evening the husband began beating his wife, and she ran out into the street screaming and took refuge in the house of her newly rich neighbor.

"Oh, signora," she said, "for mercy's sake let me stay here for the night! My husband is trying to murder me! That miserable drunkard has been beating me to a pulp. Oh, poor me! Oh, I could die from it all!"

"Oh, of course you can stay with us," replied the widow. "You'll eat and sleep here in our house, and you can be certain that your husband won't dare show his face over here. Then tomorrow, when his drunken fit has passed, you can go back to your own house."

And then what did that scheming woman do? After eating dinner, she pulled out the old chest that sat in their living room and said she would make her bed on top of it. The mother and her three daughters tried to convince her to take a decent bed for the night, but she insisted on sleeping there and nowhere else. And so she was able to carry out her treacherous plan. During the night, she opened the chest and took out the doll. And the next morning she thanked her hosts, said goodbye, and returned to her own house, where her husband was waiting in eager anticipation.

"Did you get the doll?" he asked, the minute she entered.

"Yes, I did."

And then they shut the door, made up a fine clean bed using the very best linen—which had been part of the woman’s dowry—and set the little doll up in that bed.

“I have to make doo-doo,” said the doll.

“You can do it right there,” they replied.

And then the doll went *tru, tru tru*,<sup>307</sup> and filled the entire bed with excrement so horribly vile that you could die from the smell.

“You disgusting little creature!” they exclaimed. “How dare you do this to us?” And they picked up the doll and took her out to the countryside, where they abandoned her in a dilapidated shack that they found.

Some time went by, and then it happened that the king was out hunting one day, and suddenly he felt an urgent need to move his bowels. He came upon the dilapidated shack and thought it was the perfect place. After he had finished, he noticed the little doll lying on the ground with her pretty little apron, and he picked her up, intending to use the apron to wipe himself with. Well, what do you imagine that little doll did next? She leaped from the king’s hand and stuck herself right up his ass!

“Oh, help me! Help me!” shouted the king, and all his soldiers came running.

“What’s wrong, your Highness?” they asked.

“Pull this doll out of my rear end!” demanded the king.

The soldiers tugged and tugged, but they couldn’t get the doll to budge. So they carried the king back to the palace, where they summoned all the available doctors, specialists in physical medicine as well as in surgery, but they couldn’t find a single way to remove the little doll from the king’s rear end. Finally, the king decided to issue a royal proclamation: Whoever is able to remove the little doll from the king will be rewarded as follows. If it’s a man, he will receive the princess’s hand in marriage and six bushels of gold. If it’s a woman, the king will marry her and make her his queen.

Well, as you might imagine, everyone came running to try their hand at it, but no one had even a smidgeon of success. Then the widow’s two elder daughters came to try their hand at it, but they couldn’t do any better than the others.<sup>308</sup>

Finally, it was Ninetta’s turn. She approached the king, who by now was trembling all over and close to dying, with his cheeks puffed out as if his mouth were full.

307 Pitre explains that this is onomatopoeia representing the sound of the doll’s discharges.

308 The Sicilian is more vivid, using a metaphor that beautifully conveys futility: “all they could do was make a hole in the water, like all the others,” *num pòtinu fari chi un pirtusu sulu 'nta l'acqua comu tutti l'àutri*.

“Little doll of mine, come back to me!” said Ninetta.

And at once the doll jumped out of the king’s ass and ran straight to Ninetta’s arms.

“Long live my wife! Long live the queen!” cried the king. And immediately he stood up, called the members of his court, and proclaimed a solid month of festivities for his wedding with Ninetta, who by now was seventeen years old. And once they were married, there were great banquets and feasts to celebrate the event throughout the entire realm.

And so they lived on, happy and content,  
While we sit here hoping for some event.

*Told by the villager Nina Fedele to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

## 289. THE LION

**H**ere’s another tale people like to tell.

Once upon a time there was a prince who had enjoyed all the pleasures the world had to offer. He had an inscription put up over the entry to his palace that read as follows:

If you have a fine horse, you can ride where you please;  
If you have lots of money, you can do as you please.

One day a king happened to pass by and read this inscription. As soon as he got back to his court, he called one of his servants, described the location of the prince’s palace, and said, “Go summon that prince to appear before me.”

The prince soon appeared and asked, “What do you wish of me?”

“You have an inscription above the entry to your palace,” the king replied, “that says,

If you have a fine horse, you can ride where you please;  
If you have lots of money, you can do as you please.

Since this is what you’ve declared in public, I’ve decided to test you. I’m going to hide my daughter somewhere inside my palace. If you succeed in finding her, I’ll give her to you in marriage; but if you fail, I’ll have your head cut off. You have one month to perform this task.”

The prince went out in a very unhappy frame of mind, and immediately encountered an old woman who asked,

“Can you give me a penny or two?”

"Oh, leave me to my sorrows," the prince replied.

"Can you tell me what's bothering you?" the old woman asked.

"What's bothering me? Why, the king has ordered me to find his daughter within one month's time."

"Is that all that's making you so unhappy? Tell me, do you have lots of gold?"

"Yes, I do," replied the prince.

"Well, then, here's what we're going to do. We'll go to the harbor and equip a sailing vessel and load it with gold."

And after they did this, they sailed this way and that way and finally disembarked at Naples, where they went to an inn and set up a big sign saying, *All talented silversmiths should present themselves at this inn.*

When all the silversmiths were gathered there, the old woman said to the first one,

"Can you promise to make us a lion's head in three days?"

"Yes, I can," one of the silversmiths replied.

"And can you promise to make two lion's paws?" she asked the second.

"I certainly can," he answered.

"And can you make another two paws?" she asked a third.

"Indeed I can," he said.

"And can you make a lion's body?" she asked another.

"Yes, I can."

"And will you make a pair of eyes?"

"Yes," replied another silversmith.

Then they began unloading the gold from the ship as the silversmiths began work on the lion. Soon they had put together a stunning lion that sparkled all over with diamonds. The prince and the old woman took it and gave each silversmith a hundred pieces of gold as payment. Then they sailed back home and went to the old woman's house, where they loaded the lion inside a chest and made it look as if it had come from some far-off land.

Now, at that time there was a requirement that all fascinating inventions had to be shown to the king, namely, the father of the hidden princess. And so the old woman went to the palace and said to the king,

"Would you like to see something special?"

"Yes," replied the king.

So she opened the chest and took out the lion. The king was enthralled at the sight of it and asked to keep the lion overnight, until ten o'clock the next morning, and he would pay two hundred gold pieces for the privilege. The old woman at first feigned reluctance, but then she consented and left the palace. The minute she was gone, the queen came out and said to the king, "Do you

realize what a long time it's been since our daughter has been shut in without being able to see anything? Let's show her this wonderful treat."

The king agreed, and they opened up a big space in the walls and threw the lion into the place where the princess was hidden, and then sealed up the four walls again.

When evening came, the lion looked around and saw that nobody was nearby, and then it began to open up. The princess was so intent on admiring the beauty of the lion that she didn't notice the squeaking noises, until all at once the prince had come out and was standing before her. The young princess was startled, but the prince declared, "Don't be afraid! You're safe with me. Just let me have your diamond ring."

Since the young woman found this prince very handsome, she had no trouble agreeing to his request. And afterwards they enjoyed their time together very much.

At ten o'clock the next morning, the old woman returned to get her lion.

"Did you enjoy your time with the lion?" the king asked his daughter.

"Oh, yes, Papa, very much indeed."

Then the king closed up the four walls again, and the old woman left with the lion. But now the prince, who had come out from inside the lion, began walking back and forth in front of the palace. The king saw him and called out, "You have only one more day to remain alive."

The next day was the final day of the month, and the prince presented himself to the king.

"What have you accomplished?" asked the king.

"Nothing, your Highness."

"So then, shall we send you to the gallows?"

"As you wish, your Highness."

And so they set up the gallows right in the middle of the town square in preparation of hanging the prince. All the townspeople had come out of their houses to watch the spectacle, and even the princess had come out on the palace balcony to enjoy seeing what was about to happen. When they had placed the cord around the prince's neck and were beginning to pull the rope, the prince called out, "Thank you, your Highness."

"Thank me for what?" said the king.

"For your daughter and this diamond ring!"

Well, in a flash they brought the prince down from the scaffold, and the king cried out before the whole populace,

"It's really true that whoever has lots of money can do as he pleases." Then the king celebrated their wedding, and a very good time was had by all.

So those two remained as husband and wife,  
While we remain barefoot for most of our life.

*Told by Giuseppa Lupo of Casteltermini, 15-year-old daughter of the pasta maker and merchant, Pietro Lupo, who resides in Cianciana. Collected by Gaetano Di Giovanni in Casteltermini.*

## 290. ART DEPARTS, AND NATURE WILL PREVAIL

Once upon a time there was a capricious prince of Palermo, whose major whim was his belief that he could adjust the world and the animal kingdom according to his own plan, and thereby triumph over Nature. Accordingly, he taught his horse to eat meat, and his dog to eat hay. He taught his donkey to dance a ballet while braying. As a result, this prince liked to brag that he had successfully used the power of his art to conquer Nature.

One great example of his achievement was the great pains he had taken to train a cat. After much effort, he taught this cat to stand on his table at dinnertime and hold the lit candles in his claws. Dishes of meat and fish were brought to the table, and many other tasty delicacies, but the cat never once budged. Indeed, it continued to hold the candles steadily as if it were a statue made of wood. This made the prince especially proud, and he would enjoy inviting his friends to observe the cat's performance at dinner and would declare with pomposity, "Nature is nothing. My art is much more powerful and can create this marvel and others as well."

His friends would shake their heads each time they heard this and reply,

"The man who stays with Nature can never go wrong. Art departs, and Nature will prevail."

"You're dead wrong," replied the prince. "You can put my cat to as many tests as you like, and you'll see that it will never forget the art that I've taught it."

Well, the day came when one of the prince's friends happened to catch a mouse. He wrapped the mouse inside a handkerchief, stuck it inside his hat, and proceeded to the prince's house when it was dinnertime. There was the cat in his usual place on the dinner table, holding the candles firmly and showing no response to the meat and the fish that were there. The prince turned to his friend and said, "Now tell me the truth. Isn't my cat a master of self-control? Do you see him touching the meat or the fish? No, my art is a hundred times more powerful than Nature."

His friend made no response but slowly took off his hat and set it on the table, lifting the handkerchief out of the way. The mouse, now that it was free, slowly made its way upward and then poked its snout out over the brim of the hat. The instant the cat caught the scent of the mouse and saw its little muzzle come into view, it leapt, sending the candles, plates and everything else up into the air, and chased after the mouse into the kitchen.

The prince's friend couldn't stop laughing, while the prince sat there open-mouthed.

"Well, my dear prince," said the friend, "it's as I always said: *Art departs, and Nature will prevail!*"

The prince could only shrug and reply, "I was wrong, my friend. It's your saying that has it right."

*Told by Francesca Campo to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Palermo.*

## 291. EVEN PIROLLU WAS DESTROYED!

People began using this saying at the time of "The Sciacca Affair,"<sup>309</sup> when Baron Pirollu and Baron Di Luna were very closely allied. But the moment arrived when they could no longer stand one another. A wave of violence followed, and more people were killed than anyone could count. After Pirollu lost the conflict, Luna took care of him for good and had him murdered together with all his family.

Since Baron Pirollu had been a very rich and powerful man, his fate gave rise to the proverb, "*Even Pirollu was Destroyed!*" Originally it was the people of Sciacca who used it, but now it is used more widely to signify that even the richest and most powerful men end up with their face in the dust.

*Told by the countryman Giuseppe Polizzi to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Borgetto.*

<sup>309</sup> This phrase (*Lu casu di Sciacca*) refers to a civil strife in the town of Sciacca in 1529 between the powerful Perollo and De Luca families (here represented as Pirollu and Di Luna).

## 292. BY MAKING HIS POINT, ST. MARTIN LOST HIS CLOAK

**S**t. Martin was always giving charity to those who asked. Even if he had nothing but the shirt on his back, he would make a point of giving it away if someone asked for charity. Well, it happened one day that Culicchia—which is one of the many ways the Devil is called—came up to St. Martin in the guise of a poor beggar who was on the brink of starvation.

“You might as well go away,” said the saint, “since I don’t have even a penny to give you.” (Indeed, he was totally penniless at that moment.)

“Oh, please give me something!” replied Culicchia. “I haven’t eaten or even tasted water for two whole days.”

St. Martin couldn’t help but feel pity. So, being the charitable saint that he was, he took off his cloak and gave it to him.

“Take this,” he said. “It’s all I have. Now perhaps you can get something to eat.”

“Hah!” exclaimed Culicchia. “I fooled you!” And he turned back into the Devil that he really was.

“I took you for a poor beggar in need,” said St. Martin, “and I gave you my cloak. But now that I know you for what you are, you vile creature, be gone! Go back to the depths of Hell!”

And so it was that by making his point, St. Martin lost his cloak.

*Told by Francesca Amato in Palermo.*

## 293. BY ONE POINT, MARTIN LOST “THE CAPE”


**T**he Martin family was an extremely wealthy one, as wealthy as the sea is full. But they were reduced to miserable poverty, and all because of a game.

It seems that one member of this family had a terrible gambling habit, and he was constantly going into the city to play with the leading gamblers. One evening he happened to play the game called “red and black,” and he lost heavily, to the point where he had no silver or gold left. After that, the gambling was on credit, and this member of the Martin family kept pledging family properties and losing one after another. Finally, he had lost everything except one piece of property called “The Cape.” He placed this property as

his final stake and stared ahead, wide-eyed, as his points were totaled up. You could read the desperate hope that showed in his face. But you can imagine his anger when the points were all in, and he lost “The Cape” by just one point.

*Collected by Michele Messina-Faulisi in Alimena.*

## 294. WITHOUT A GOOD KNOT, THE STITCH WON'T HOLD

nce upon a time there was a grandmother who lived by herself in one house, and her granddaughter, who was married, lived in another.

One day the grandmother fell ill, and so she called her granddaughter and said,

“Listen, my child, if you take care of me in my illness, then, after my death, I’ll give you the secret of my knotted string purse.”

“Oh, no, dear grandma. What need would I have of your knotted purse? I’ll just devote myself to taking care of you, and you can feel free to do as you wish with your purse.”

Such was her reply, but in her thoughts she was already eager to get her hands on the money in her grandmother’s purse. Well, the grandmother kept getting worse, and soon seemed close to death. To make a long story short, the granddaughter had been thinking about the purse during all this time, so when she saw that her grandmother was already very weak and barely able to speak, she said to her,

“Grandma, by now your voice is almost gone. You spoke earlier about the secret of your purse. Don’t you think you should tell me now where it is?”

“Just wait a little while longer,” answered the old woman.

The granddaughter was getting more impatient by the minute. Finally, the moment arrived when the grandmother was so weak that she really had difficulty speaking at all. She called her granddaughter to her side and said,

“Now listen closely, my child, and I’ll tell you the secret of the knotted purse. When you are sewing, it’s absolutely vital to always make a good knot in the string. Otherwise, without a good knot, the stitch won’t hold, and all the strings will unravel.”

Hearing this, the granddaughter flew into a rage and ran out of the house, leaving her grandmother to fend for herself. She had been counting on getting the purse with all the money in it, but came away with nothing.

The grandmother died, and her last words remained as a proverb. That's why people say, *Without a good knot, the stitch won't hold.*

*Told by Francesca Buscemi to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Palermo.*

## 295. WHAT A DISASTER FOR THE THREE LADIES!

**W**ell, they say that in olden times Emperor Frederick was here in Sicily, and he was a very cruel man.<sup>310</sup> There was a popular uprising in Naples, and what did he do? First, he had lots of people killed. Next, he took three very beautiful ladies and brought them to Palermo. They came from good families who had joined the rebellion, and so he had them buried alive in an underground chamber of the royal palace. It was because neither hide nor hair of these three women was ever seen again—not even the slightest trace remained—that the saying originated, *What a disaster for the three ladies!*

*Told by Francesca Buscemi to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Palermo.*

## 296. THE TREASURE OF THE ZISA

**O**nce upon a time there was a prince, and he had a daughter whom he kept in the abbey of St. Catarina, so that she would lead a monastic life.

One day the abbess came up with the idea of having the princess ask her father to lend the abbey some nice candlesticks, fine plates, and other precious objects of silver and gold, so that the church and the room inhabited by the princess could be richly decorated for a special celebration. And so, in the name of the princess and the abbess, two servants from the abbey were sent to the prince's house. However, they made a mistake, and instead of going to the prince's house, they went instead to the palace of the Zisa. After they knocked, a strange creature appeared.

"What do you want?" asked the creature.

"Is this where prince so-and-so lives?" they asked.

310 The reference is to Frederick II (1194–1250), Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily under the title Frederick I. The rebellion took place in March of 1243.

“Yes,” came the reply.

“Well, we’ve been sent by his daughter and the abbess to give you this letter, requesting a loan of some precious items of gold and silver to decorate the abbey. This letter identifies us as servants at the abbey, so you can give the precious objects to us.”

“Wait here, and I’ll be right back,” said the creature.

And after some time it returned carrying two cartons filled with heavy gold and silver objects—candlesticks, goblets, plates, and every possible thing you could want, all ornamented with diamonds and precious stones, the likes of which had never been seen before.

“Here, carry all this back to the abbess, and please convey to her the prince’s best wishes.”

So they carried these items back and the abbess and the princess held a grand celebration, using all these silver and gold objects to give the abbey a truly regal appearance. Everyone was dazzled by the incredible splendor of it all, and people exclaimed, “Christ! Why, not even the king has treasures like this!”

When the celebration came to an end and it was time to send the precious items back, the same two servants were summoned and given the two cartons filled with the same objects. They returned to the palace of the Zisa and knocked, and the same creature came and opened the door.

“Here,” they said. “The abbess is returning the prince’s treasures, with many thanks.”

But the creature did not show any desire to take the cartons, and just stood there looking at the two servants.

They stared back, as speechless as two blocks of wood. Then they asked, “Perhaps you’d like to check them and make sure that everything is there?”

But the creature just looked at them, took the cartons, and without pausing to look at the contents simply shook its head, saying, “What fools you were!”

And with these words the creature vanished, so did the palace, and the two servants found themselves standing outside the Porta Nova.

“Oh, my goodness!” they said. “How in the world did we end up here? We’ll never figure this one out!” they concluded, and so they returned to the abbey without intending to give it any further thought.

Not long after, the prince paid a visit to the abbey.

“Oh, my dear good prince,” the abbess said to him. “I’m so grateful for the favor you did us!”

“Oh, father,” said the princess, “thanks to you and all those magnificent gifts you sent I made quite an impression here in the abbey! No one had ever

seen anything like them before. I had never seen them either, and I wonder where you were keeping all those precious things?"

Then other members of the abbey kept praising the prince and thanking him profusely. But the prince was completely befuddled.

"What are you all talking about?" he inquired. "I don't understand any of this."

Gradually, after a few questions and answers, all the facts came to light.

"I don't understand any of this," the prince said again. "Who in the world could have given you all those gifts? Let's call the two servants and ask them what happened."

When the two men arrived, they were asked, "How did this all happen?"

And they proceeded to tell the whole story, including the creature's last words, and how everything vanished and they found themselves outside the Porta Nova.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed the prince. "You really did play the part of fools! That palace was the Zisa, filled with all the devils' enchanted treasures, beyond any the world has ever seen. What a great stroke of luck! You had the chance to empty out this incredible vault of treasures, and you were too dumb to take advantage of it! But one day it will all be emptied out, and when that day comes, the city of Palermo will be rich beyond all imagining."

*Dictated by Francesca Buscemi to Salvatore Salomone-Marino in Palermo.*

## 297. THE PEASANT AND THE KING

Gentlemen, once upon a time, so it's been told, there was a peasant, and among the peasants there are some who are very smart, and nobody can get the better of them. This particular peasant worked and earned two tari every day, and they added up to four carlini<sup>311</sup> that made for a handful. (Today we have centimes that are a treasure!) At the end of the day the peasant took his money and headed for home. Along the way, he would say to himself, "I'll use one carlino to eat, one to deduct, one to pay back, and one to throw away."

Every day it was the same tune, and then one time he met the king, who heard him and asked, "Hey you, what do you mean by this tune?"

311 A carlino was a coin and part of the money used at the end of the nineteenth century in different regions of Italy.

"Your majesty, I'll reveal everything to you. I use one carlino to nourish myself. Another carlino I deduct for my children. The third I give back to my father for all he's done for me, and the last carlino is for my wife that's more or less thrown away. Each gets a carlino."

"Keep quiet about this!" the king said. "Keep it to yourself. This will make for a great riddle. You're not to tell anyone about this until you've seen my face a hundred times."

Later the king called together his ministers and challenged them to solve this riddle. Do you think the ministers could ever solve it? They went to the peasant, and the peasant didn't utter a peep. Do you think he was a simpleton?

But one of the ministers kept pestering the peasant to give him the answer, until he could resist no longer.

"Do you want me to reveal the answer? Give me one hundred gold coins, and I'll confide in you."

As soon as the minister counted out the hundred coins, the peasant told him the secret to the riddle. The minister kept everything hush, hush, and returned to the king.

"Your majesty, I've come to tell you the answer to your riddle," and he explained everything to the king.

Bear in mind that there were two sides to the gold coins, and on one side the face of the king was stamped, and on the other, an image of the kingdom. So, when the peasant received the coins and began to count them, he only looked at the side where the face of the king was stamped and observed the face completely at his ease.

When the king heard that the minister had solved the riddle, he called for the peasant and asked, "Well, why didn't you follow my orders? Remember, I told you not to reveal the secret of the riddle to anyone until you saw my face a hundred times."

"I did just that, your majesty."

"What do you mean? You've only seen me twice in your life."

"I asked for one hundred gold coins with your face stamped on them, and after I saw your face a hundred times, I revealed the secret."

"You're absolutely right!" said the king who was astounded by the way the peasant used his brains.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina at Palermo.*

## 298. PINNÌCULU PINNÀCULU PINNÍA

Once upon a time there was a merchant whose business required him to travel constantly. When he was near a village, he could always find an inn where he could spend the night, but sometimes it turned dark while he was still walking, and in that case he would stop and rest wherever he found himself, even in a wood.

Well, it was on one of those occasions that he found himself dead tired and in the middle of a wood, so he lay down under a pear tree to sleep. A band of robbers happened to spot him there, and they said, "Come on, boys! There's an easy victim. Let's go get him." And they started toward him.

Now, the pear tree happened to be loaded with beautiful, ripe pears, each of them weighing nearly a pound. Since there was a light breeze, the pears were swinging back and forth, this way and that, until one of them actually broke free from its stem and fell down—*poom!*—smack on the merchant's face. He leapt to his feet, looked around him, and immediately spotted the robbers who were coming to get him.

"Is it me you're coming after? Well, let's go, blessed feet of mine, and get me out of here!"

And that's where the riddle comes from, that goes as follows:

The sleeping Pico Pendolo was pelted by a pendulous pear,  
Which saved his life. Can you guess the why and the where?<sup>312</sup>

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

## 299. THE DEVOTEE

Once upon a time there was a very old man who was married and had a daughter. When he felt the end of his life drawing near, he made a will, and after his death they opened the will and found the following words: "I leave my daughter to St. Joseph."

After a few days had passed, the poor daughter, now an orphan, began spinning as a means of earning her daily bread. But since the little bit she

312 Our translation seeks to capture some of the verbal play of the original, which involves echoes of the Sicilian verb *penniri* (Italian *pendere*), "to hang." See the endnote for further analysis of the riddle.

earned was not nearly enough for her food and clothing, she was always shabbily dressed.

One day, as she was spinning, an old man appeared carrying a small pouch.

"My dear child," he said, "here's some bread for you. From now on you'll have something to eat every day, you can use the money you earn from your spinning to clothe yourself, and that way you can get ahead in life."

Well, once the young woman was well-fed and well-dressed, her neighbors couldn't help noticing the improvement and became terribly jealous. They began spreading lots of nasty rumors about her that eventually reached the ear of the judge. He summoned the young woman and said,

"Tell me, young lady, how do you manage to feed and clothe yourself so well with the small amount of money you earn from your spinning? Is it true that you receive callers?"

"Your lordship," she replied, "all I can tell you is that an old man happened to call upon me one day, and he said, 'I will bring you something to eat every day, and you can use what you earn from your spinning to clothe yourself.' "

"And do you have some of this bread to show me?" asked the judge.

"Yes, sir," she replied. "I still have two pieces here in my purse."

The judge took the bread, sniffed its aroma, and then said to the young woman, "You may go, my child. Continue to eat as you have been eating and to spin as you have been spinning."

Then he sent for the people who had been slandering her and had them all thrown in jail as punishment for the damage they had done to the poor woman's reputation.

Now there happened to be a king of this realm who had a son, and this young prince was seriously ill and in danger of dying. So the king issued a proclamation that announced: "Whoever can restore my son's health will receive half my kingdom if it's a man, or will become my son's wife if it's a woman."

People came in great numbers, but no one was able to restore the prince's health. This news reached the ear of the old man who brought the young woman her bread, and he went to the royal palace to see the king. When the palace guard saw how shabbily dressed he was, he refused to admit him. "I'm sorry, but you must admit me," said the old man. "The proclamation was for everyone, and I have a right to see the king!"

Their argument grew so loud that the king heard it, and he came to see what was going on.

"Your majesty," said the guard, "there is a shabby old man here who claims he can restore your son's health."

"Let him enter, let him enter!" said the king.

When the old man had gone up to the king's chambers, he asked, "Where is this sick son of yours? I have many talents that can cure him."

So the king led him to his son's room, and there was the young prince, barely alive and close to breathing his last breath. The old man took out a small flask and proceeded to spread some ointment over the prince's entire body. As soon as this was done, the prince was instantly cured and seemed as if he had never been sick even for a minute.

"Your majesty," said the old man, "now you must keep your promise. I have a daughter, and by the terms of the proclamation, you should make her your son's wife."

But the queen was there, and upon hearing these words, she said to the king, "How could we ever let our son marry the daughter of this shabby fellow?" Then, turning to the old man, she said, "We will give you all the money you want, so that you can marry your daughter to a worthy person, but as for our son, we plan to have him marry a princess."

"It's not money that I want," replied the old man, and he turned on his heel and left the palace.

The minute the old man was gone, the prince fell ill again. Now the king had to issue another proclamation: "Whoever can find that old man and bring him back to me will receive a giant sack of gold."

Now, there happened to be a man who was the poor father of a family that was greatly in need, and he recognized the old man as he was walking through the city. "Oh, good grandfather," he said, "you're the one the king is looking for. Please go to the palace, and that way you can get the prince for your daughter and I can get the sack of gold for my family."

"My son," answered the old man, "it's not worth doing this solely for the prince, but because you need the money I am willing to help you."

So he went to the palace where he spread some ointment over the prince's body again, and the prince returned to perfect health. Now that the prince was cured, the king said to the old man,

"How can we arrange your daughter's marriage to my son?"

"It will be easy," replied the old man. "Everyone is to get into a carriage and ride to her house."

And so the king and the queen (who was still against this marriage taking place) and the prince all got into a carriage and rode to the house, while the old man went ahead of them. When they arrived they found a maiden with as lovely a face as the good Lord ever created, and a house more beautifully furnished than the house of the greatest lords, with chandeliers, divans, chiffonieres, handsome carpets and silver candlesticks the likes of which had never been seen. There was also a lady there who acted as the maiden's

mother. When the queen saw the beauty of the bride-to-be and the unparalleled riches, her face burst into a great smile, and she ran to the young woman, unable to resist any longer but now quite happy to give her hugs and kisses.

Now they all came out of the house, the old man who was acting as the maiden's father and the lady acting as her mother, and they joined the king and queen and the prince. But the minute they got into the carriage, the father and mother disappeared, leaving only the young couple and the king and queen. At that moment they all realized that the girl's parents were really St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary, who had taken her under their protection because of her virtuous life. And then the prince and the young maiden were wed.

And so they remained in contentment and peace,  
While we just sit here, clicking our teeth.

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

### 300. A RARE KING

**O**nce there was a gentleman who had fallen upon hard times, and there was no work of any kind he could do because he was simply too lazy. Well, one day he went to Palermo to see the king, and because he was a scheming fellow, his intention was to live off his patron.

When he presented himself to the king, who was a kind and charitable person, the king said,

"What would you ask of me, my friend?"

"Oh, your majesty," replied the gentleman, "since I cannot work, because I am not skilled at any kind of labor, I come before you to ask for a charitable donation."

The king looked the man over from head to foot and then asked,

"My friend, how much did you pay for those trousers?"

"Five ducats, your majesty."

"And how much for that vest?"

"Two ducats, your majesty."

"And how much for that overcoat?"

"Six ducats, your majesty."

"And for that hat?"

"Two ducats, your majesty."

Next the king inspected the man's hands, which were fine and white. Then

he announced, "I'm sorry I can't offer you anything at this time, but do come again."

And so the gentleman departed.

Now, there was a gardener who had a little donkey, and he was supporting a large family, with seven children plus his wife, and that made eight people he had to support. He earned his living with his donkey, which he used for carrying vegetables to the city. But one day his donkey died, and the poor man became desperate. How could he possibly support his family now?

"You know that we have a good and charitable king," his wife said to him. "Why don't you go and see if he'll give you the money to buy a new donkey?"

And so the man went to the palace and asked to see the king. He entered, respectfully removed his beret, and said, "Your Majesty, I'm a poor gardener with seven children and a wife to feed, and they're all starving. My donkey died, and I can't buy another one because I have no money."

The king looked at him and then took his hands and examined them. After he saw how callused the man's hands were from all the work he had done, the king kissed the man's hands and said,

"Oh, blessed hands that provide for an entire family. Now tell me, how much would a new donkey cost?"

"Eight ducats, your Majesty."

The king wrote a voucher for one hundred ducats and said, "Here, take this voucher and get one hundred ducats. You can use forty to buy a good mule, and with the remainder you can clothe your wife and children."

Well, with what joy did that poor gardener skip down the palace stairs! He went back to his wife, bought the mule, dressed all his children, and had money left over for the future. And this is all a true story.

*Told by Master Vincenzo Aricò and collected by Gaetano Di Giovanni at Casteltermeni.*

## Endnotes



These notes, including the variants of the tales, are based on material that we have gathered from the following works:

- Aarne, Antti and Stith Thompson. *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and a Bibliography*. 2nd rev. ed. FF Communications No. 3. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1961.
- Pitrè, Giuseppe. *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani*. 4 vols. Palermo: L. Pedone Lauriel, 1875.
- Uther, Hans-Jörg. *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and a Bibliography*. 3 vols. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 2004.
- Zipes, Jack, ed. *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm*. New York: Norton, 2001.
- , ed. *Beautiful Angiola: The Great Treasury of Sicilian Folk and Fairy Tales Collected by Laura Gonzenbach*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- , ed. *The Robber with a Witch's Head: More Stories from The Great Treasury of Sicilian Folk and Fairy Tales Collected by Laura Gonzenbach*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Most of our comments are based on Pitrè's own notes and different versions of the tales. We have generally kept the references to various tales and collections in the original language, with some exceptions. Whenever the name of a folklorist, collector, or scholar is recorded in the notes without mention of the work, the work can be found listed in the bibliography which follows the notes.

Each tale title is accompanied with the Sicilian title and designated number in Pitrè's original compilation. The titles are followed by the tale-type classification in Uther's revision and expansion of Aarne and Thompson, *The Types of International Folktales* as a helpful reference. In some cases there is no tale-type classification because many of the tales are particular to Sicily.

### 1. The Tale Told Time and Again—Lu cuntu di “Si racconta”

This tale was placed at the beginning of Pitrè's collection because it represented his perspective on storytelling. To tell a tale, he believed, brings about a sense of empowerment, and one needs to have imagination and originality to tell a tale anew. We have not found any other versions of this tale type outside of Sicily, and this may be another reason why Pitrè included it as the

first in his collection. It could perhaps be categorized under the Tale Type ATU 2300—Endless Tales.

Pitrè published another version of this tale from Cianciana told by Rosario Diliberto, who worked in the sulfur mines; it was transcribed by Gaetano Di Giovanni.

*The Retold Tale (Lu si racconta)*

I've heard tell that there was once a poor father who possessed just one ass to his name. This father also had three sons and made out a will. He gave the ass to the eldest son, the pack saddle to the second, and the harness to the third. The son who received the ass went to a village to sell the ass. There was a merchant sitting by a window, and when he saw the peasant pass by, he asked him who owned the ass.

"It's yours, if you want to buy it," the young man replied.

"Yes, your excellency. But let's make a bet," the merchant said to him. "You bet your ass, and I'll bet my shop. If you can tell a tale without saying 'I've heard tell,' you'll win the shop. If you say 'I've heard tell,' you lose the ass."

"All right," the peasant said and accepted the bet.

"How much time do you need to tell the tale?" the merchant asked.

"I need three days," the peasant replied.

Three days passed, and the merchant said, "Tell your tale."

The peasant agreed and said, "I'm ready."

"Begin."

"I've heard tell," said the peasant.

"You've lost," the merchant said. "Remember, the bet was that you had to tell a tale without saying 'I've heard tell.' "

"Well then, I've lost," admitted the peasant.

So he left the ass there and departed. When he returned to his village, he went to his brothers and said, "I was at Calamonci. I wanted to sell the ass and found a merchant sitting by a window. He told me that he wanted to buy the ass, but then he said he wanted to make a bet. I lost the bet and had to give him the ass."

After hearing this story, the brother who had the saddle got up and went to the same village to sell the saddle to the same merchant. They made the same bet, and the brother lost the saddle. Now the brother who had the harness went to the same merchant to sell it, and he made the same bet—the harness or the shop.

"How much time do you need?"

"Twenty-four hours," the peasant replied.

Twenty-four hours passed, and the merchant called to him and said, “Look, it’s time for you to tell your tale.”

“I’m ready,” he said and began to tell this tale,

“My mother had a hen that laid twenty-one eggs, and among the twenty-one eggs, she discovered a little chick. This little chick sang and said, ‘Get out, merchant, because this shop is mine.’ ”

The peasant won the bet and took over the merchant’s shop.

It is clear in this tale that the teller knew a version of “The Tale That’s Been Told Time and Again,” and that the chick is similar to the promissory note which the girl had found in the chick’s feathers.

## 2. The Parrot with Three Tales to Tell—Lu pappagaddu chi cunta tri cunti

### Tale Type ATU 1422—Parrot Reports Wife’s Adultery

After the introductory tale that comments cleverly on the power of storytelling, Pitrè had good reason to place this tale second. It is a text of remarkable structure and complexity: the frame tale encloses three internal tales (told by the parrot), which narrate the continuing adventures of the same heroine. It is tempting to see a connection between the internal tales and the main tale. The bold heroine of the parrot’s tales, who excels in liberating trapped women, may be seen as offering subtle encouragement to the imprisoned merchant’s wife to liberate herself from her oppressive enclosure and possessive husband. But, the tale’s morality is as complex as its structure. We cannot help cheering for the parrot as a moral force, protector of the wife against seduction (and we, along with the good wife, are ourselves seduced by his storytelling power). But once we have embraced the parrot as our hero, to what extent should we endorse his final performance as unpunished murderer and successful seducer?

This rich narrative is all the more impressive for being oral and not written literature, a text told to Pitrè by his best informant, the non-literate seamstress Agatuzza Messina. The parrot’s repeated phrase, “Stay here and I’ll tell you a story,” becomes emblematic of the power of oral storytelling to seduce, entertain, and support us. The frame-tale format is characteristic of Eastern narrative traditions, the most familiar example being the Scheherazade frame-tale in *The Thousand and One Nights*. This specific tale has a clear prototype in classical Sanskrit literature, recently made available in A. D. N. Haskar’s *Shuka Saptati: Seventy Tales of the Parrot* (2001). Although containing a much

larger series of tales, this text offers the striking similarity that the parrot tells his tales to protect a housebound woman from seduction by outsiders. One can only wonder at the channels by which key features of this Sanskrit tale, originating in the fifteenth century, found their way into Sicilian oral tradition.

Pitrè noted thematic similarities with “The King of Spain’s Daughters”; a similar opening to “Gràttula-Beddàttula”; and similarities between the gentleman’s encounter with the old woman and themes in “Erbabianca,” “Child Margarita,” and other tales in his collection. He also saw a distant connection between the third tale and Basile’s “Verde prato,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*, as well as with Imbriani’s “El Pegorée,” *La novellaja milanese*, which have the theme of curing a sick prince or princess. Pitrè mentioned a Palermitan version, “Donna Viulanti,” which has the same three internal tales with the one significant difference that the magical figure is a seven-headed serpent, transformed by night into a handsome youth and killed when seven hunters simultaneously shoot his seven heads. Pitrè knew the three internal tales as existing independently with the following titles: (1) “The Story of the King who Went Hunting,” from Salaparuta; (2) “The Ailing Princess,” from Capaci; (3) “If the Doll Is so Beautiful, Imagine the Owner!” from Trapani.

He also knew a version from Salaparuta, “Lu frati e la soru” (“The Brother and the Sister”), which he called “superior” and summarized as follows.

### *The Brother and the Sister*

A brother and sister went hunting, and in the thickest part of the forest the sister became lost. Not knowing how to escape, alone and in despair, she threw herself on to the ground and fell asleep. A young prince passed by and was struck by her beauty. After covering her face with a handkerchief, he continued his hunt, intending to return when she awoke and to take her with him. But an old man happened to pass by, took pity on her, and brought her to his house, where his wife took just as kindly to her as he did. The old couple had a daughter who was mute, and the girl shared this daughter’s bedroom.

That night, a handsome youth appeared, used a key to open the mute girl’s mouth, and took delight in conversing with her. The other girl saw it all, but pretended to be asleep, even when the youth tried to test her by dripping a drop of hot wax from his candle on her cheek. The next day the girl asked the old couple for a reward if she could restore their mute daughter’s speech. That night, when the youth appeared, she snatched away the key that caused the enchantment and ran off shouting, “Help! I’m scared!”

The servants and the old couple came running, and the youth hid himself in a chest of drawers that was in the room. When they found the daughter safe and sound and cured of her muteness, they burned the chest of drawers and rewarded the virtuous young maiden. The fame of this deed was spread around the world and finally reached Naples, where the king had a daughter so sick that there was no hope for her cure. Therefore, he asked to have the services of the brave young maiden for a few days. As soon as she arrived, she asked to be left alone with the sick girl, whose violent convulsions caused her to hit her head against the wall. That night a gust of wind extinguished the lamp. Seeking to re-kindle it, the girl went off toward an illuminated room she saw in the distance. There she found a sorcerer who had a cauldron boiling over a great fire. When she realized what was happening, she went and pushed the cauldron so that it spilled over both the sorcerer and the fire. When he was dead, she returned to the princess and found her in a deep sleep, no longer tormented by the mysterious malady. When the princess woke up, she was cured, and the brave maiden handed her over to her father, who showered her with gifts and sent her back to the old couple.

There was another king whose son was seriously ill, and the poor prince spent his days moaning and groaning. The king heard about the brave young maiden and sent for her. After she arrived, she had herself shut in the invalid's room, where he told her his story. He had gone hunting and come upon a ravishingly beautiful maiden—who in fact looked like her. He covered her face with a handkerchief, and when he came back from the hunt, she was no longer there. From that moment on he was overcome by a profound melancholy that threatened to take his life. At this point the girl pulled out the handkerchief that the prince recognized at once, and immediately he was cured. Soon after he took the fortunate maiden as his wife.

*Collected in Salaparuta.*

### 3. The King of Spain's Daughters—*Li figghi di lu Re di Spagna*

There is no recognizable tale type for this story that combines different motifs in an unusual manner. Pitre commented that he had placed this tale immediately after "The Parrot with Three Tales to Tell" because it amounted to a combination of the stories told by the parrot that were more successfully developed in that longer tale. Thus he considered this tale an important variant of the preceding one.

#### 4. Pretty Poor-Girl—Povira-bedda

##### Tale Type ATU 891—The Man Who Deserted His Wife

The sparring in verse between heroine and prince is a brief version of the exchanges developed at great length in “The Pot of Basil;” and the attempt by the queen to marry her son to a royal bride instead of the heroine is similar to that in “Marvizia” and is a version of the widely used motif of the “false bride.”

Similar tales can be found in Boccaccio’s, “Giletta di Nerbona,” *Decameron*; Straparola’s “Ortodosio Simeoni,” *Le piacevoli notti*; Basile’s “La Sapia Liccarda,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*; and Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier’s “The Discreet Princess, or The Adventures of Finette,” *Oeuvres meslées*. See also Pitрэ’s “Catarina the Wise,” and other variants listed in Lo Nigro’s *Racconti popolari siciliani*.

The prince’s desire for revenge is also the desire to control a woman. When he finally does try to kill her, he licks the “blood” from the sword because, according to Sicilian folklore, this gesture will prevent him from being tormented by remorse or from being discovered. Of course, the sugar or honey makes him regret his actions even more, and all his efforts to control Sorfarina are frustrated.

#### 5. The Pot of Basil—La grasta di lu basilicò

##### Tale Type ATU 879—The Basil Maiden (The Sugar Puppet, Viola) and ATU 891—The Man Who Deserted His Wife

This tale, like Catarina the Wise, features a spunky and independent heroine, a commoner, who repeatedly gets the better of a prince in a contest of wits and strategy, before she finally marries him. Such heroines seem to have been favorites with Agatuzza Messina, Pitрэ’s major informant. The tale stands out for its steady repetition of witty verse in escalating units of length, as each character momentarily gains the upper hand.

Pitрэ says this tale more often goes under the name “La bedda Majurana,” and he also mentions a version from Polizzi titled “Lu Zu Ninu” (where the rhyme names parsley rather than basil). He cites a precise parallel for the teasing exchange in verse in Basile’s “Viola” and a more general plot parallel in “Sapia liccarda,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*, as well as in Imbriani’s “La Stella Diana,” *La novellaja milanese*, and “La Verdea” and “La Bella Giovanna,” *La novellaja fiorentina*. The story of the doll is also paralleled at the end of

Gonzenbach, “The Daughter of Prince Cirimimminu,” and “Sorfarina,” *Sicilianische Märchen*, and in Bernoni’s “Il Diavolo,” *Fiabe popolari veneziane*. The prince licking the blood off his sword has traditional Sicilian overtones as we have explained in the previous note.

## 6. Catarina the Wise—Catarina la sapienti

### Tale type ATU 891—The Man Who Deserted His Wife

The closest variant is Gonzenbach, “Sorfarina,” *Sicilianische Märchen*. But Luisa Rubini points out the interesting difference that Sorfarina is less “censored:” the heroine has her three children as the prince’s lover, not as his wife. Earlier parallels are Boccaccio, “Giletta di Nerbona,” *Decameron*; Straparola’s “Ortodosio simeoni,” *Le piacevoli notti*; Basile, “La sapia liccarda,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*; and Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier, “The Discreet Princess, or the Adventures of Finette,” *Oeuvres meslées*. Rubini notes that the tale type was first recorded in India in the eleventh century.

Pitrè cited a Sicilian variant titled “Sapienza, ti converti!” in which the prince continually asks Sapienza if she has “converted,” i.e., changed her mind, and she refuses until she finds him on his death bed, where she takes pity and gives in with the words “*mi cunvertu!*” At that point the prince is cured.

Pitrè also provided the following variant.

### *Beautiful-and-Wise (Bella-e-sapiente)*

Beautiful-and-Wise was the name of a princess who attended a school for boys and girls, where the husband taught the boys and his wife the girls. One day the two teachers had to be absent to attend a wedding party. The male teacher assigned his classes to a boy who was the king’s son, and the female teacher gave hers to Beautiful-and-Wise, who was the best of her students. The male and female students began to enjoy themselves, and the prince declared that one day he would marry Beautiful-and-Wise. She gave him a slap and complained to the female teacher, who gave her an enchanted wand. Soon the prince and Beautiful-and-Wise were married. When they were alone on their wedding night, the prince asked her if she recalled the slap and was sorry for it, and she answered no. Thereupon her husband bound her, placed her in an underground chamber, and departed for Rome. She used her magic to get free and arrive in Rome before him, setting herself up in a palace facing his. Soon they got together, but he didn’t recognize her. When she became

pregnant by him, she gave birth to a son whom she called Romano. Then he went to the city of Lucia, and she again preceded him there and had a second child of his, called Luciano. Finally, he made a third trip to Alexandria, and there she bore him a girl called Alessandrina. Between each trip he returned home to repeat the question to his wife, but she remained obstinate and refused to repent. He then decided to marry the King of France's daughter. But Beautiful-and-Wise came to the wedding with the three children and had them confront their father.

*Collected from Giuseppa Furia in Ficarazzi.*

Pitrè also saw a parallel between Catarina's obstinacy in refusing to repent even when she is lowered into the basement, and the obstinate refusal of the wife who is lowered into a well in "With the Scissors," tale 257 in this collection. He also noted that Catarina's pattern of repeated appearances is similar to those of Ninetta in "Gràttula-beddàtula" (tale 42), of Pilusedda (tale 43), and of the young king in Gonzenbach's "The Humiliated Princess" in *Sicilianische Märchen*.

## 7. The Count's Sister—La soru di lu conti

### Tale Type ATU 1419E—Underground Passage to Lover's House and ATU 926—Judgment of Solomon

This story can be traced back to the late Middle Ages and is found in the anonymous *Seven Wise Men* of the thirteenth century among other works. The traditional plot concerns adultery, not virginity. Generally speaking, it is not a brother who guards the chastity of his sister and is deceived. Rather, it is a husband who is deceived by an adulterous wife, who manages to meet her lover through an underground passage. This theme is common in many of *The Lais of Marie de France* from the late twelfth century. Variants of "The Count and his Sister" were widespread in India, Turkey, Greece, and Italy.

Pitrè noted that this tale was widely diffused in Sicily. Calvino observed that this tale has elements of novelistic romance often found in Sicilian folk-tale tradition but largely avoided in the tales collected from Messina. Gonzenbach published an important version "The Count and his Sister," in *Sicilianische Märchen*. Calvino had high regard for this tale type, which is also more sexual than most of the Sicilian tales. In the variants quoted below, there are references to nudity, rarely mentioned in many variants. This is the simple story of a love affair, and its appeal derives in large part from its poetry, the repeated verses that punctuate the advances in the plot and the heroine's

“solo aria” at the end that proves her to be the child’s mother. Pitrè’s variants also contain the repeated verses and the mother’s “solo,” while Gonzenbach’s version has only the repeated verses. The motif of pretending a child is dead, or threatened with death, in order to discover its true mother is reminiscent of the Biblical judgment of Solomon and is widespread in world literature (cf. Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*). For other variants, see Basile, “La mortella,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*, in which a prince is secretly visited in his bed for seven nights by a fairy woman; Imbriani, “Ombrion,” *La novellaja milanese*; and Bernoni, “Re Bufon,” *Fiabe popolari veneziane*, in which a female and male protagonist exchange verses with a lamp very similar to the couplets used in our tale.

Pitrè provided summaries of two Sicilian variants, “Lu cannileri” (The Candlestick) from Vallerlunga and “La lampa d’oru” (The Golden Lamp) from Noto, as follows.

#### *The Candlestick (Lu cannileri)*

The girl protagonist, alone in a room of her palace, always eats meat with no bones. One day her mother sends her a piece of meat with a bone in it, and she uses this new tool to bore a hole in her wall and pass directly through to a room of the royal palace. There she finds an enchanted candlestick and asks it:

Candlestick of gold, candlestick of silver,  
What is my lord doing, sleeping or active?

And the candlestick answers:

My lady, you may pass safely within,  
The prince is sleeping in the nude.

For three nights she sleeps with the prince, who cannot learn her identity despite various devices (such as using saffron or placing nails on the floor). Nine months later he wakes to find the girl has left a baby at his side. To find out who the mother is, he has the baby exposed in the palace as if dead, with funeral music. Dressed as a peasant woman, the mother arrives to mourn, crying:

Son of a worthy mother,  
Your feet pierced with nails;  
Son of a vain mother,  
Her clothing stained with saffron.

Thus she stands and confesses; the prince takes her as his wife; and she is recognized as:

Sister of a count, and wife to a king.

*Collected in Valledlunga.*

### *The Golden Lamp (La lampa d'oru)*

The count is the king's councilor and is the father of the girl who is in love with the king, not her brother. When the girl questions the magic lamp, it answers:

Enter, lady, please come in,  
My lord is sleeping in the nude.

The words of the mother lamenting her supposedly dead child, in this case a girl, are:

Daughter of a mother so fine,  
You were tied with a little chain;  
Daughter of a mother so fair,  
A silken ribbon held you there.

*Collected in Noto.*

## 8. The Talking Belly—La panza chi parra

This story, which has no tale type, was first published by Pitre as tale seven in *Fiabe e leggende popolari siciliane* (1870).

Pitre wrote:

I don't know any Italian stories that can compare with the present one. There is something similar in the second story of this collection "The Parrot with Three Tales to Tell" and in "Prima veste del discorso sugli animali" by M. Agnolo Firenzuola. The motif of dispatching the painters to draw a picture of the most beautiful woman and to provide a prince with a bride because he is not content with the women in his kingdom is also in Laura Gonzenbach's "The Story about the Daughter of the Sun," *Sicilianische Märchen* (Tale Type ATU 898—The Daughter of the Sun).

Pitre remarked that "the dialogue between the prince of Butera and the old peasant also reads in part like a kind of riddle. In his collection of *Canti popolari siciliani*, n. 841, there is this one from Resuttano:

"La muntagna bianca è,  
E la lenta curta è,  
Li dui vannu cu li tri."

In Vallelunga:

“Addiu, omu di terra.”

“Adu, omu di guerra.”

“Lu munti è biancu?”

“Tempu nn’è.”

“E li dui?”

“Sunnu tri.”

“E li spissi?”

“Picca cci nnè.”

“T’ha cadutu focu supra la casa?”

“Dui voti.”

“Ti nn’havi a cadiri cchiù?”

“N’ altra vota.”

Pitrè glosses the last part in Italian as follows:

“Gli spissi, sono i denti; il fuoco, le figliuole. Hai avuto mai figliuole? Hai figlie?”

“Devi averne più?”

“Una altra.”

## 9. The Three Cottages—Li tri casini

The motifs in this tale are similar to the ones in tales 6, 7, and 8. The focus is on a prince who refuses to marry and comply with either his father’s or mother’s wishes.

## 10. Water and Salt—L’acqua e lu sali

### Tale Type ATU 923—Love Like Salt

Pitrè published some other versions that showed important differences.

### *The Holy Father (Il padre santo)*

A merchant had two children, a son and a daughter. He had to depart with his son and left a priest in charge of his daughter. After the priest had consumed all the money that had been left behind to feed and support the maiden, he locked her up in a cellar. When the father returned, the priest accused her of bad behavior. So the father ordered his son to kill her. But her brother set her

free in the woods, and as a sign that he had killed her, he brought the blood of a dog that he had killed to his father who gobbled it up.

The maiden wandered in the woods and came upon the palace of another holy father. This one cared for her and placed her in charge of all that he owned. Beneath the palace of the holy saint there was a turkey, and when the bird saw that the maiden was becoming more beautiful with each day that passed, it said,

You, so beautiful and so neat,  
Are the one the holy father will eat.

The maiden revealed all this to the holy father, who told her to respond that she would become the holy father's heiress. When the turkey heard this, it became quiet. Soon after, the son of the king fell in love with the maiden and asked the holy father for her hand. Before celebrating the wedding, the holy father advised the maiden to invite her father, her brother, and the gloomy priest to attend the ceremony. And he instructed her to give her brother a crown, an apple, and a ribbon; her father only an apple, and the priest, nothing.

"After the first night," the good holy father added, "you are to heat a kettle three nights and days, and then you're to throw me inside. Soon after you'll take out three chests filled with crowns, apples, and ribbons."

Everything went well, and when the father wanted to hear the explanation from his daughter, whom he did not recognize, why she treated them so differently, she told her story as if she were some one else, and her father's grief became visible as did the emotions of her brother and the fear of the gloomy priest. Everything was cleared up at the end, and the evil priest was burned to death.

*Collected in Polizzi-Generosa.*

### *The King of France (Il Re di francia)*

One of the three daughters of the King of France dreamed that she became queen, and that seven kings, among them her father, adored her. Therefore, her father sent her to be killed in a forest, where, however, she was set free. Eventually she made her way to the house of a sorcerer, who took care of her. A parrot sitting on the king's balcony, sang:

Groom yourself, groom yourself well,  
The wild man will eat you as well.

Upon hearing the sorcerer's advice, she responded:

The wild man looks after me as his daughter  
 Your feathers will make for a nice little pillow.  
 Your meat will make for a good meal or two.

The rest of this tale is similar to “Water and Salt.”

There is also an interesting version from the district of Borgetto called “The Tale of the Salt” (“Lu cuntu di lu sali”). It differs only slightly from the present version. The parrot sings to the maiden: “Ah, princess, do you know where you are? The ogre will nurture and rear you, because he wants to eat you.” And the ogre has the maiden respond: “The ogre is nurturing and rearing me because he wants to marry me to the son of the king.” On the wedding day the princess shows up and asks her father why he hasn’t eaten. He tells her that the food didn’t have any salt. Then his daughter explains to him the meaning of “I love you as much as salt” (*vuliri beni quantu lu sali*).

*Collected in Noto.*

### *My Son the Doctor (Figlio mio dottore)*

A father had a son and sent him to study in Catania. When he turned twenty, he finished his studies and became a doctor. After he returned home, his father asked him what was the most useful thing in the world, and the young man responded: a piss pot. His father was offended, chased him out of the house, and cursed him. The young man went to the holy city where he first became a priest, then a bishop, next a cardinal, and finally Pope. One day, his father, full of remorse, went to Rome where he threw himself at the feet of the new Pope and obtained grace and pardon for the crime that he had committed against his son. The Pope recognized him and gave him lodging in his palace. At dinner time he had his father’s food prepared with a laxative, and that evening he gave his father a room without a piss pot for emergencies. During the night the poor father needed to relieve himself, but he couldn’t find anything, and seeing himself in the middle of silk and gold drapery, he exclaimed in pain, “Ah, my son the doctor! Oh, how right you were!” The pain increased as did his moaning and groaning until his son appeared and revealed himself to his father. Everything finished with a solemn embrace.

*Collected in Partanna.*

There are other important variants such as: Bernoni, “Come ’l bon sal,” *Fiabe popolari veneziane*; Coronedi-Berti, “La fola del trèi Sùrel,” *Novelle popolari bolognesi*; Knust, “Die Königssohn und die Bauertochter,” *Italienische*

Märchen; Pico, *Storia della regina Oliva, figliuola di Giuliano imperatore e moglie del re di Castiglia*; Imbriani, “Re avaro,” *La novellaja fiorentina*.

### 11. My Three Beautiful Crowns—Li tri belli curuni mei

This tale can be compared with Coronedi-Berti’s “La fola dla Bissuleina Bolognese,” *Novelle popolari bolognesi*. It is similar to Tale Type ATU 612—The Three Snake-Leaves. However, the plot of that tale type is different and involves a husband who revives his dead wife with three snake leaves. Later she betrays him and either kills him, or she is punished.

### 12. King Dead Horse—Lu Re Cavaddu-mortu

#### Tale Type ATU 425—Beast as Bridegroom

Pitrè included another version, “Russu-comu-sangu” (“Red as Blood”), told in Palermo.

A princess, born out of a wish made by her parents and cursed by an old woman, goes in search of the Prince Red as Blood. While she is searching for him, she wears out seven pairs of iron shoes. Then, with the help of a pious woman, mother of the South Wind, the North Wind, etc., she succeeds in finding him. However, he is enchanted in a well where he is immersed in a lot of water, and she needs more than a month to free him. She becomes tired from such long and exhausting work and falls asleep for a moment. A Moorish maiden appears and continues to drain the water from the well, and just at that moment, the prince gets out, and the magic spell is broken. Since the prince believes that the Moorish maiden freed him, he marries her. That night the poor betrayed princess makes herself known to the prince and reveals the treachery. She marries the prince, and the Moorish maiden is burned at the stake in the public square.

To succeed in finding Prince Red as Blood, the princess goes through the same ordeals of the search that the wife of the Pig Prince must endure in the twelfth tale of *Volksmärchen aus Venetien*, collected and edited by Widter and Wolf with notes by Köhler, published in the *Jahrbuch für romantische und englische Literatur*. The title is “Der Prinz mit der Schweinshaut” (“The Prince with the Pigskin”). In “Red as Blood,” there is a hermit who directs the princess to the homes of the North and South Winds. In the Venetian tale it is the sun who sends her to the wind, whose mother is much more pious than the mother of the North Wind, who hides her from her cannibalistic son. The same thing is told in another variation, “El re crin,” *Novelle popolari*

*piemontesi* edited by Antonio Arietti. In this tale the maiden receives help and advice from the mother of the winds.

The rhymed refrain that the Mamma-draga (ogress) utters when she enters her palace can also be found in other Italian folk tales. For instance, in Vittorio Imbriani's *La novellaja fiorentina*:

Mucci, mucci!  
Sento puzzo di cristianucci;  
O ce n'è, o ce n'è stati,  
O ce ne'è degli impiattati.

Also, in Imbriani's *La novellaja milanese*:

Usc, usc!  
El sa de cristanuscc!

In Arietti's "El re crin" in *Novelle popolari piemontesi*:

Fum, fum!  
Sento odour d'cristianum!

All these rhymes are similar to the famous one in English folk tales uttered by the giant in "Jack and the Beanstalk:"

Fee-fi-fo-fum,  
I smell the blood of an Englishman.  
Be he alive, or be he dead  
I'll have his bones to grind my bread.

### 13. Snow White, Flaming Red—Bianca-comu-nivi-russa-comu-focu

#### Tale Type ATU 310—The Maiden in the Tower

Here are various short Sicilian versions and summaries published by Pitrè.

#### *Donna Gnàngula*

In this one a queen, who desires to have either a son or a daughter, makes a vow to build a fountain of oil and a warehouse of grain for the people if she has a child . . . . The curse that the old woman makes when the young prince becomes older is: "May you never marry until you find Donna Gnàngula!" Later, Donna Gnàngula flees with the prince, and besides taking gold, she provides herself with a box of nails, a bunch of razors, a fistful of flint stones, and a piece of soap. The ogress, who had held Donna Gnàngula in her power,

pursues the two young lovers, who drop the objects behind them one after the other. The ground becomes razor-edged and slippery, making it difficult to run on. When Donna Gnàngula and the prince are reunited, she transforms herself into an eel, and the prince into a fountain. The ogress drinks up all the water to get the eel, but she remains disappointed and can't get them. Out of desperation, she utters the curse of the mother's kiss to prevent the future union of the two lovers. Forgotten by the prince, Donna Gnàngula makes two talking dolls and sends them to the court. They reveal everything at the wedding banquet of the prince, who has married another maiden.

*Collected in Cianciana.*

### *Beautiful Maiurana (La bella Maiurana)*

A king has three daughters and a son. The daughters marry three sons of a magician. The king's son, who has broken the egg in a basket of an old woman, is cursed and cannot be happy until he finds the beautiful Maiurana. So, he leaves, and after a week's journey, he asks for something to drink at a house. He is treated horribly there, but then he is recognized as the brother-in-law and brother of the owners of the house. He is given better care and good advice. After he resumes his journey, the same thing happens with the other brothers-in-law and sisters in two other houses. Finally he finds the beautiful Maiurana, kept prisoner through an enchantment by an ogre and a sorceress, parents of his brothers-in-law. The prince kills the ogre and sorceress on top of a mountain, and he frees himself, the beautiful Maiurana, his sisters, and his brothers-in-law from a magic spell.

*Collected in Cianciana.*

### *Beautiful Rosa (La bella Rosa)*

In this curious but dry version, beautiful Rosa is sitting in a tree and waits for the prince. Her face is reflected in the water of a well below her. A slave comes to fetch some water, and the pitcher breaks. She sees beautiful Rosa and sticks a pin into Rosa's head, turning her into a pigeon. The slave marries the prince. At the wedding banquet, the pigeon flies into the royal kitchen and sings:

Cook, cook, working in the kitchen  
What's the king doing with the queen?  
They're in a room behind the curtains of a bed  
And I'm in misery and almost dead.

The pigeon knocks the salt all over the meat so that it cannot be eaten. This

happens three days in a row until the prince realizes what has happened and takes beautiful Rosa for his true bride.

*Collected in Noto.*

Pitrè states that he collected another very curious version in Palermo with the title “Biancu com’ovu e russu comu focu,” or “White Like an Egg and Red Like Fire,” in which a princess is cursed, and she must go in search of the Prince Red Like Fire. Pitrè refers to two other Sicilian tales, “La bedda di lu russu di l’ovu,” which he collected in Polizzi-Generosa, and “La bella di li setti citri,” which he collected in Casteltermini and published in *Otto fiabe e novelle siciliane*. Here is a summary of the latter tale:

A prince who was born because of a vow made by the king throws a ball at an old woman and breaks her jug causing her to utter a curse: “May you never marry until you find the beautiful princess with the seven veils.” When he turns sixteen, the prince goes in search of the beautiful princess. The last of three hermits advises him to go to a mountain guarded by two lions. These beasts will let him pass only if he throws some goat meat to them. Then he must gather the seven veils in a garden and open one after the other. A maiden comes out of each one of the veils, and he offers each one some water. The seventh one accepts the water, and it is the beautiful princess of the seven veils. They were all under a magic spell, and all the princes who had entered the garden had been turned into stone. Everything works out for the prince. However, when he returns to his own realm with the princess with the seven veils, Alexander (the name of the prince) keeps her hidden outside the city because she is disheveled. He goes to fetch clothes for the beautiful princess at his own castle and dresses her in these fine garments to present her at court.

*Collected in Noto.*

Other significant versions are: Basile, “Le tre cetra,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Gradi, “La ragazza dalle bionde trecce sanese,” *Vigilia di pasqua di Ceppo: otto novelle*; De Gubernatis, “Tre aranci,” *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*; Coronedi-Berti, “I tri zider,” *Ciaqlira dla Banzola*; Imbriani, “I tre tosánn del re” and “I trii Naranz,” *La novellaja milanese*; Gozzi, *L’Amore delle tre melarance*; Schneller, “Der Prinz mit den goldenen Haaren,” *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*; and Gonzenbach, “Beautiful Angiola,” “Autumunti and Paccaredda,” and “Federico and Epomata,” *Sicilianische Märchen*.

#### 14. Mandruni and Mandruna—Mandrini e Mandruna

##### Tale Type ATU 425D—The Vanished Husband

This tale's opening incident—the boy mischievously throwing and breaking the old woman's jug and receiving her curse—also opens ATU Tale Type 408, The Three Oranges. This motif is frequently seen elsewhere—e.g. in “Snow-White, Flaming Red” (tale 13 in this collection); Gonzenbach's “The Princess and King Chiccheriddu,” “The Beautiful Maiden with the Seven Veils,” and “Beautiful Innocenta,” *Sicilianische Märchen*; as well as in the frame tale of Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti*. Also in Basile, “Penta mano mozza” (Penta Without Hands) has a magician who publicly announces a reward for whoever comes and relates the greatest misfortune, a parallel to what Mandruna does as innkeeper.

This is an unusually complex tale in that it has both a hero and a heroine, who, at first, wander and have adventures together but then go their separate ways to meet individual challenges. Each is disguised twice, becoming first a peasant and then a repulsive old person. The story builds to an unconventional resolution as hero and heroine become an appropriate match because of their unattractiveness, an interesting inversion of the first romance between the two, when they ran off together as the perfect fairy-tale couple. Thus, the tale develops a serious moral vision by requiring Mandruna and Mandruni to earn their “fairy-tale” love a second time through experience and suffering.

#### 15. The King of Spain—Lu Re di spagna

##### Tale Type ATU 313—The Magic Flight and ATU D2003—Forgotten Fiancée (Bride)

For interesting variants, see: Schneller, “Die drei Tauben,” *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*; and Imbriani, “El re del sol,” *La novellaja milanese*.

#### 16. The Three Obedient Children—Li tri figghi obbidienti

##### Tale Type ATU 552—The Girls Who Married Animals

See the following important variants: Basile, “I tre re bestie,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Musäus, “Die Bücher der Chronika der drei Schwestern,” *Volksmärchen der Deutschen*; Friedmund von Arnim, “Vom Schloß der goldenen

Sonne," *Hundert neue Märchen im Gebirge gesammelt* (1844); and Grimm, "Die Kristallkugel," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*; Pitрэ, "Lu re di li setti muntagni d'oru," *Novelline popolari siciliane*; Gonzenbach, "Beautiful Cardia," *Sicilianische Märchen*; and Knust, "Die vier Königskinder," *Italienische Märchen*.

## 17. Marvizia—Marvizia

Tale Type ATU 425A—The Animal as Bridegroom, ATU 425B—Son of the Witch, and ATU 313—The Magic Flight

This tale mixes parts of several tale types with motifs familiar from other Sicilian and Italian tales, as well as from Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti*. In Tale Type 425B, it is normally made explicit that the heroine must complete the ogress's tasks as the requirement for freeing the prince from his enchantment, but here the connection is only implicit, and the prince continues to be referred to as a bird. The ogress's attempt to substitute a false bride is identical in detail to "The King of Love" and appears in more general form in "Pretty Poor-Girl."

Pitrэ noted that this tale is basically the same as Gonzenbach, "King Cardiddu," *Sicilianische Märchen*, although "Marvizia" begins differently with the heroine's quest as a pilgrim and her encounter with the hermits, motifs seen elsewhere in Pitрэ's collection. Pitрэ published another version called "Spiccatamunnu" in his *Nuovo saggio di fiabe e novelle popolari siciliane* and possessed in manuscript form a tale called "Re Carlu d'amuri." He also cited two parallel stories, "Lo turzo d'oro" and "La palomma," in Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, and "Le due belle gioie" in Imbriani's *La novellaja fiorentina*. He noted several other parallels for the ogress setting impossible tasks for the heroine in Italian tales of the Cinderella type. Also, the motif of carrying torches for a marriage goes back to a Roman custom mentioned in Plautus, and the trick of packing the candle with powder and bullets is found in the legend of "The Madonna of Trapani," which Pitрэ published in *Canti popolari*. He also noted that the details of the flight from the ogress resemble those of "Snow-White, Flaming-Red," and the specific detail of a prince transformed into a green bird is seen in Gonzenbach's "The Green Bird," *Sicilianische Märchen*. In addition, it is important to note that the following tale, "The King of Love," also presents the animal groom as a green bird.

## 18. The King of Love—Lu Re d'amuri

### Tale Type ATU 425A—The Animal as Bridegroom

This is one of many versions of the Cupid and Psyche story first recorded by the Roman novelist Apuleius in *The Golden Ass*, mid second century A.D. In the Cupid and Psyche pattern, a sub-type of 425A, the husband keeps his appearance a mystery because he visits only at night; the heroine's sister(s) convince her to try to see his face; she does so with a candle or lamp and accidentally awakens him by dripping hot wax or oil on him, and he abandons her. Then she undergoes a series of trying ordeals to recover him.

Pitrè indicated that there were many parallels to this tale: "King Crystal" (tale 281 in this collection); Gonzenbach, "The Story about the Merchant's Son Peppino," *Sicilianische Märchen*; Schneller, "Die Heirat mit der Hexe," *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*; Basile, "Lo Catenaccio," *Lo cunto de li cunti*. He called the preceding tale, "Marvizia," "a variant," and noted that the following tale, "The Slave," begins in a similar way up to the appearance of the Turk, and that the bath in milk appears also in "The Magic Balls."

## 19. The Slave—Lu scavu

### Tale Type ATU 311—Rescue by the Sister

This story is clearly related to the conditions of poverty in Sicily during the nineteenth century. The father is glad to find positions for his daughters because they are so poor, and he does not realize that they are going to be abused by a monster, ogre, or robber. In many similar fairy tales, it is the youngest sister who redeems the murdered sisters, and "The Slave" recalls different versions of "Bluebeard" and "The Robber Bridegroom." In most of these tales and other variants, the daughters leave their home because they think they will improve their living conditions (sometimes they are kidnapped). Whatever the case may be, they always fall into the hands of an evil sorcerer, robber, monster, or ogre. Then the youngest daughter must find a way to rescue her sisters and herself.

In Sicily, there are many other versions of this tale with different titles: "Lu cavuliccidaru," "Malu cani," "Manu pagana," and "Manu viridi." In "Malu cani," a sorcerer takes all three daughters of a poor man and orders them to keep watch over his shop. Two of them are turned into stone because they fall asleep. The third one, who is more cunning, keeps watch. So the sorcerer lets her live and places her in charge of his treasure. When the miserable dog (the

sorcerer) goes to sleep, the clever maiden revives her sisters and the other princes. After she escapes with them, she marries a prince.

Other important versions are: Perrault, “La barbe bleue,” *Histoires ou contes du temps passé* (1697); Grimm, “Fitcher’s Bird” and “The Robber Bridegroom,” *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*; Gonzenbach, “The Story of Oh My” and “The Robber with a Witch’s Head,” *Sicilianische Märchen*; Imbriani, “Il contadino che aveva tre figliuoli,” “L’Orco,” and “Assassini,” *La novellaja fiorentina* and “‘Lombrion,” *La novellaja milanese*; Gradi, “Tèa Tècla e Teopista,” *Scritti letterari per la Gioventù*; Widter and Wolf, “Der Teufel heiratet drei Schwestern,” *Volksmärchen aus Venetien*; Bernoni, “Il Diavolo,” *Fiabe popolari veneziane*; and Schneller, “Der Teufel und seine Weiber” and “Die drei Schwestern,” *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*.

Here is a summary of Imbriani’s “Assassini:”

The head of a band of robbers takes away a tailor’s three daughters and brings them to his palace where they are supposed to keep watch over it, otherwise they will be killed. The two older sisters die. The third one keeps watch. She brings her sisters back to life and escapes with them. She goes to the court of the prince where she becomes his wife. Soon after, the head of the robbers covers himself in a bearskin and performs in a play at the court, where he intends to kill the princess. But she has the bear killed, and they uncover the assassin.

## 20. The Old Woman of the Garden—La vecchia di l’ortu

### Tale Type ATU 310—The Maiden in the Tower

Extremely popular throughout Europe, this tale has an illustrious literary history with the following key works: Basile, “Petrosinella,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de la Force, “Persinette,” *Les contes des contes*; Schulz, “Rapunzel,” *Kleine Romane*; Grimm, “Rapunzel,” *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*; Bechstein, “Rapunzel,” *Deutsches Märchenbuch*; and Imbriani, “Prezzemolina,” *La novellaja fiorentina*. The incarceration of a young woman in a tower (often to protect her chastity during puberty) was a common motif in various European and Oriental myths and became part of the standard repertoire of medieval tales, lais, and romances throughout Europe and the Orient. In addition, the motif of a pregnant woman who has a strong craving for an extravagant dish or extraordinary food is very important. In many peasant societies people believed that it was necessary to fulfill the longings of a pregnant woman, otherwise something terrible, like a miscarriage or bad

luck, might occur. Therefore, it was incumbent on the husband and other friends and relatives to use spells or charms or other means to fulfill the cravings.

In Sicily there is a variant from Polizzi with the title “Li cummari,” in which the old woman is an ogress. Otherwise, some other important versions are: Gonzenbach, “Beautiful Angiola,” *Sicilianische Märchen*; Bernoni, “La Parzemolina,” *Fiabe popolari veneziane*; Coronedi-Berti, “La Fola di Zuannein,” *Novelle popolari bolognesi*; and Widter and Wolf, “Die Prinzessin im Sarg und die Schildwache,” *Volksmärchen aus Venetien*.

## 21. The Marriage of a Queen with a Robber—Lu spunsaliziu di 'na riggina c'un latru

### Tale Type ATU 653—The Four Skillful Brothers

There are several tales that have more or less the same circumstances.

#### *The Sorcerer Tartagna (Il mago tartagna)*

A king promised his daughter's hand in marriage to any man who could jump over a moat that was thirteen yards wide. The sorcerer Tartagna managed to do this and obtained the princess as his bride. Then he took her with him to his palace with seven bronze doors and locked her inside where he kept her chained to him by his very long tail. After seven years the poor maiden managed to send a letter to her father through a swallow to let him know about her sad situation and to alert him that she could only be saved by seven brothers, each of whom had to have a different skill. The brothers were found and went to free her. The first one opened the bronze doors without making a sound. The second untied the maiden from the magician's tail and carefully released her. (This young man could lift an egg from under a hen without her feeling anything.) The third placed her inside a bronze turret and ran like the wind. When the ogre or sorcerer awakened, he pursued them, but the other brothers created obstacles and hindrances by throwing things on the ground causing heaps of chickpeas, flintstones, soap, and other things to pop up in their way. The ogre begged them to allow him to see his wife for one last time, and she showed him a finger and died. The seventh brother played a pipe and revived the princess so that the ogre had to turn back in despair. When they arrived at the royal court, the brother, who had carried away the princess, was awarded the princess, who became his wife, and the others consented. Meanwhile, the sorcerer sought to revenge himself by constructing a silver statue of

Saint Anthony. After locking himself inside the statue, he had it sold to the court. At night he climbed out and enchanted a paper card beneath the pillow of the queen that cast a spell on everyone, and he succeeded in taking her from the bed without being heard. Then he carried her to a kettle of oil that he had prepared and was about to boil her when the paper card fell from the pillow causing her to awake and scream. The servants came running, and the sorcerer was thrown into the boiling oil.

*Collected in Cianciana.*

### *The Seven Brothers (I sette fratelli)*

The daughter of a king issued a proclamation that she would marry whoever had the strength to throw a bronze ball that weighed more than 200 kilos over the royal palace. A cavalier passed the test and thus married the princess and departed. He became a serpent and bound her to him with his long tail, forcing her to eat human flesh. Seven brothers with seven different skills arrived to rescue her. The first one ran faster than the wind. The second could hear everything that was said beneath the ground by placing his ear to the ground. The third just had to place his finger on the pavement and a bronze tower would arise. The fourth could smash seven iron doors. The fifth could swipe eggs from under a swallow without being discovered. The sixth could shoot and hit anyone he saw. The seventh could revive anyone who died by playing his pipe.

*Collected in Casteltermini.*

Another tale that is similar to “The Marriage of a Queen with a Robber” but less complete is Laura Gonzenbach’s “The Seven Brothers with Magic Talents” in *Sicilianische Märchen*. This tale concerns a princess whose fate is predicted by an astrologer, who says that she will be taken by a giant when she turns fifteen. He carries her to his underground palace where she is eventually liberated by seven brothers.

Other important versions can be found in Basile, “Lo polece,” “Can-netella,” and “Li cinco figlie,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Knust, “Der Kaufmannssohn aus Livono,” *Italienische Volksmärchen*; Widter and Wolf, “Die vier kunstreichen Brüder,” *Volksmärchen aus Venetien*; Schneller, “Die Frau des Teufels,” *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*; Coronedi-Berti, “La fola del falegnam,” *Novelli popolari bolognesi*; and Imbriani, “Re Avaro,” *La novellaja fiorentina*.

This story was popular throughout the Orient and Europe, particularly in Italy. The important literary versions are: Morlini, “Three Brothers Who

Become Wealthy Wandering the World” (“De fratibus qui per orbem pererando ditati sunt”), in *Novellae, fabulae, comoedia* (1520); Straparola, “Tre fratelli poveri andando pel mondo divennero molto ricchi,” *Le piacevoli notti*; Grimm, “The Four Skillful Brothers,” *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.

Most of the material in all the tales can be traced to ancient India, especially the motif of the extraordinary talents acquired by the sons. In the old Hindu collection *Vetalapanchauinsati* (*Twenty-five Tales of a Demon*) there is a story in which a beautiful princess named Somaprabha will only marry a man if he has one of the following qualities: courage, wisdom, or magic power. Three suitors arrive and convince three separate family members that they are suitable for the princess. Each receives a promise that he can marry her. However, when the suitors seek to claim her, there are major problems because the family members had not consulted with one another. But suddenly the princess disappears, and the royal family asks the suitors to help them. The first suitor, the man of wisdom, informs them that a demon has abducted the princess and brought her to a forest. The second, the man of magic power, transports them to the forest in a magic chariot. The third, the man of courage, kills the demon. But the question remains: who deserves the princess? The answer is the man of courage because the first two men were created by God to be his instruments and were intended to help him kill the demon. The first European literary version of this tale type was written in Latin by Morlini, and Straparola translated it into Italian and adapted it. Given the comic element of the tale and the common problems regarding the education of sons, it was popular in both the oral and literary tradition. Basile took delight in the tale by giving it a special twist at the end by having the father win the princess. The social conditions of apprenticeship and the father’s concern for the future of his sons served as the social historical background for the humorous adventures. The individual “crafts” that the sons learn formed the basis for other types of folk tales. For instance, the son’s art of thievery is related to the “art” of other master thieves in the oral and literary tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Other important versions are Eberhard Werner Happel’s tale about three peasant sons in his novel, *Der ungarische Kriegs-Roman* (1685) and Clemens Brentano’s important fairy tale “Das Märchen von dem Schulmeister Klopstock und seinen fünf Söhnen,” (c. 1811–15), which was based on Basile’s “Li cinco figli,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*.

## 22. The Seven Robbers—Li setti latrì

Tale Type ATU 956B—The Clever Maiden Alone at Home Kills the Robbers, ATU 311—Rescue by the Sister, and ATU 958E—Deep Sleep Brought on by a Robber

Other interesting variants are: Gonzenbach, “The Youngest Clever Merchant’s Daughter” and “The Story about Oh My,” *Sicilianische Märchen*; Imbriani, “Gli assassini” and “Tre fornarine,” *La novellaja fiorentina* and “I trè tosann del prestinée,” *La novellaja milanese*; and Bernoni, “Il Diavolo,” *Fiabe popolari veneziane*.

## 23. The Thirteen Bandits—Li tridici sbannuti

Tale Type ATU 956B—The Clever Maiden Alone at Home Kills the Robbers

There are many different versions in Sicily. Here are a few gathered by Pitrè.

### *Teresa (Trisicchia)*

Trisicchia, or Teresina, was the daughter of a grand merchant in Monacella. One evening she left the monastery and went to the palace of thirteen robbers. She drugged them, hacked off parts of their bodies, and then left. When they regained consciousness, they swore they would get revenge. The chief pretended to be a peddler of oil. He put the twelve robbers into twelve goat skins that were used for oil, and he sold them to the abbess of the monastery where the maiden was staying. Having overheard the chief and the abbess, the maiden invited her companions to stick red hot irons into the goat skins.

After some years passed, the maiden left the monastery. The chief of the robbers, now disguised as a rich merchant, asked for her hand in marriage. The maiden recognized him and accepted the proposal. But she asked her father to have a doll made as large as she was. The first night after the wedding, she went to bed and hid beneath the bed with milk and honey. The robber asked her about the past, and she moved the head of the doll with a special instrument. He gave her a blow with the sword, and he licked the blade.<sup>313</sup>

313 As already mentioned, the licking of the bloody sword had a special significance in Sicily. After a person was wounded or killed, it was commonly believed that by licking the sword, the perpetrator would derive courage from the blood for what was to come, and also frequently, impunity.

Since the blade was dipped in honey and milk, he found it sweet and immediately repented his crime. Then the maiden came out from beneath the bed, and they embraced happy and content.

*Collected in Ficarazzi.*

*The Two Step-daughters (Li dui figliastri)*

A shoemaker had two daughters, Margareta and Teresa. When the shoemaker married for a second time, his daughters abandoned their paternal home to flee from the bad treatment by the stepmother. They arrived at a palazzo with thirteen robbers who held a competition to see who would enjoy the maidens. The maidens, however, drugged the robbers' biscuits, took their money, and fled. They went to another country where they had a palace built and stayed inside with a great amount of provisions for living. The robbers came and scaled the palace, but they were killed by the sisters who recognized that they were disguised with false noses. The chief of the robbers remained alive, but he, too, was killed one night when he tried to accost one of the sisters and murder her. Instead, he died in a kettle of boiling oil.

*Collected in Casteltermini.*

*The Nuns (Li batioti)*

One of eight nuns, assigned to watch a lamp lit in front of a saint, falls asleep, and the nocturnal lamp dies out. The nun goes through a window in search for a light outside the monastery, and she approaches a palace. There are twelve robbers there, and out of fear, the nun promises them that she will come back the next day with her companions. She keeps her promise. However, she and her companions drug the robbers, steal all their valuables, and leave the palace. Once the chief of the robbers realizes what has happened, he locks himself in a statue of a saint that he sells to the monastery. The statue is taken into the church. The clever nun is chosen to guard the lamp, and during the night she hears someone moving in the statue. She rings the bells. People come, and the chief of the robbers is discovered.

*Collected in Cianciana.*

*Sister Sosizedda (Soru Sosizedda)*

Sister Sosizedda, an audacious nun, finds herself at the dinner table with twelve novitiates and thirteen robbers. After she drugs the robbers, she cuts off their noses and takes away their gold and silver. The chief of the robbers

disguises himself and pretends to be in love with Sister Sosizedda. She returns his affection in order to induce him to send her jewels. But when she has them, she no longer appears at the window of her palazzo. Then the chief of the robbers disguises himself as a traveling peddler of pins, ribbons, etc. Sister Sosizedda recognizes him and calls him to come beneath her window so that she can pull up his basket of objects to choose something to buy. The peddler says that he wants to be pulled up in the basket so he can be there when she chooses an object. Sister Sosizedda pulls and pulls the basket, and when it is high up, she suddenly lets it fall to the ground, and the chief of the robbers loses his life. At the end there is a wedding celebration, and she must take care to protect herself with a doll made out of sugar and honey.

*Collected in Vicari.*

This motif of the doll made of sugar and honey, used as a protective trick by the heroine, is found in several other Sicilian tales in this collection. (See the note to tale 5.) Other versions of this tale can also be found in Ser Giovanni Fiorentino's *Pecorone*, Gonzenbach's *Sicilianische Märchen*, Imbriani's *La novelleja fiorentina*, and Pitre's *Otto fiabe e novelle siciliane*.

#### 24. White Onion—Bianca cipudda

This tale is related to tales about haughty women (often princesses), principally Tale Type ATU 900—King Thrushbeard.

With the exception of the game, much of this story can be found in the first novella of the fourth day in Ser Giovanni Fiorentino's *Pecorone*: Giannotto's father dies, and he goes to Venice where he is welcomed and treated like a son by a rich merchant named Ansaldo. Giannotto wants to see the world. So he sets sail on a ship and lands at the port of Belmonte. There he meets a widow, who promises to marry him if he gambles with her at her pleasure. The lady succeeds in winning the merchandise that he has brought with him by putting a magic potion into a drink that he takes before going to bed. On the third night Giannotto wins because a kind maid tells him not to drink the liquor.

#### 25. The Silversmith—L'arginteri

Tale Type ATU 567A—The Magic Bird Heart and the Separated Brothers

Elements and motifs of this tale can be found in Straparola, "Adamantina figliuola di Ragolina Savonese, per virtù du una poavola, di Drusiano re di

boemia moglie diviene,” *Le piacevoli notti*; Basile, “La papara,” *Lo cunti de li cunti*; and Imbriani, “Coa,” *La novellaja milanese*.

## 26. Pietro the Farm Steward—Petru lu massariotu

### Tale Type ATU 566—The Three Magic Objects and the Wonderful Fruits (Fortunatus)

Variants can be found in: Gonzenbach, “The Shepherd Who Made the Princess Laugh,” *Sicilianische Märchen*; Imbriani, “Il figlio del pecoraio” and “Leombruno,” *La novellaja fiorentina*; Schneller, “Das Pfeifchen,” *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschetirol*; Widter and Wolf, “Hollenpförtner,” *Volksmärchen aus Venetien*; and Knust, “Bauersohn,” *Italienische Märchen*.

This tale type reflects the great European interest in the “fortunate” or lucky young man who acquires magical gifts that enable him to gain wealth and power. Numerous tales about this hero arose during the Middle Ages and were printed in chapbooks. There is even a version in the *Gesta Romanorum* (*Deeds of the Romans*, fourteenth century). Eventually the oral and literary tales led to the publication of a popular German fairy-tale novel *Fortunatus* (c.1489), by an anonymous author; it was translated into many other European languages in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

## 27. Peppi, Who Wandered Out into the World—Peppi, spersu pri lu munnu

### Tale Type ATU 400—The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife, ATU 302—The Ogre’s (Devil’s) Heart in the Egg, ATU 566—The Three Magic Objects and the Wonderful Fruits (Fortunatus)

There are not too many versions of this tale type to be found in Sicily. Two close variants can be found in Gonzenbach’s *Sicilianische Märchen*: “The Story about the Merchant’s Son” and “The Story about Ciccu.”

## 28. The Magic Purse, Cloak, and Horn—La vurza, lu firriolu e lu cornu ’nfatatu

### Tale Type ATU 566—The Three Magic Objects and the Wonderful Fruits (Fortunatus)

Pitrè included the following two variants:

*To God and Adventure (A Diu e a la vintura)*

A poor peasant who is on his deathbed leaves something for each one of his three sons. He bequeaths a cat to his first son that the son can sell for 400 ounces of gold because the cat can catch many mice; to the second son, he bequeaths a rooster that the son can sell for 400 ounces of gold because it serves as a clock; to the third, he bequeaths his destiny according to the will of God and the fortunes of adventure. So, this last son goes out seeking adventure, and a woman gives him a purse that continually produces money; a soldier gives him a tool that enables him to build as many ships as he wishes; and a blind man gives him a violin. If he moves the bow to the right, it can cause someone to die. If he moves it to the left, he can revive dead people.

With all these precious things, he arrives at Naples, where his brothers are already grand merchants and members of the king's court. The king wants to borrow the purse for a week. Meanwhile, a war erupts with the King of Turkey. The young man is sent to do battle with the Turks. He wins the war, and as a reward, he is given the princess and becomes the prince of Palermo.

*Collected in Cianciana.*

*The Father's Blessings (La binidizioni di lu patri)*

One of three sons receives the blessings of his father, and when the father dies, he goes out into the world seeking his fortune. Soon he is reduced to eating grass and is dying of hunger. When he eats some figs, horns begin to grow all over him, but when he eats figs from another tree, they disappear. He keeps this secret to himself and goes to the king's court where he gives the princess a basket of bad figs. The horns grow, and when the king searches for a doctor who can get rid of the horns, he disguises himself and presents himself at court. Using the good figs, he helps get rid of the horns and marries the princess.

*Collected in Casteltermini.*

There are other variants in: Gonzenbach, "The Story about Ciccu," *Sicilianaische Märchen*; Imbriani, "Coa," *La novellaja milanese*; Coronedi-Berti, "Fola del Nan," *Novelle popolari bolognesi*; and Widter and Wolf, "Der arme Fischerknabe," *Volksmärchen aus Venetien*.

29. The Poor Shoemaker Dying of Hunger—*Lu scarpareddu mortu di fami*

Tale Type ATU 563—The Table, the Donkey, and the Stick

Other versions of this tale can be found in: Basile, “*Lo cunto dell’Huerco*,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Grimm, “The Magic Table, the Golden Donkey, and the Club in the Sack,” *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*; Schneller, “Die drei seltenen Stücke,” *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*; Gradi, “*Tèa Tècla e Teopista*,” *Vigilia di Pasqua di Ceppo*; De Gubernatis, “*Bastoncrocchia*,” *Le Novelline di Santo Stefano*; Bernoni, “*Ari ari, caga danari*,” *Fiabe popolari veneziane*; and Gonzenbach, “Magic Cane, Gold Donkey, and Little Stick That Hits,” *Sicilianische Märchen*.

This tale can be found throughout Europe. The texts by Basile and the Grimms contain three important fairy-tale motifs: banishment of the sons or son from home; an apprenticeship; and demonstration of magic skills and gifts. In this respect, the two tales bear a similarity to those tales in which sons go out into the world to learn a craft, especially in the humorous way in which the protagonists manage to bumble their way through life. It is as if the heavens were protecting them. In some of the oral versions, it is the devil who helps the awkward and naive youngest brother. In his adaptations of Basile’s tales, Clemens Brentano, the German romantic poet, wrote a hilarious, political version of “The Ogre” entitled “*Das Märchen vom dem Dilldapp*” (wr. 1805–11, rev. 1815).

30. The Little Nun—*La munachedda*

Tale Type ATU 563—The Table, the Donkey, and the Stick

31. The Empress Trebissonna—*La ’Mperatrici Trebissonna*

Tale Type ATU 566—The Three Magic Objects and the Wonderful Fruits (Fortunatus) and ATU 580\*—The Inexhaustible Purse

According to Pitre, this is the well-known “*Historia di Leombruno*,” a tale originally told in verse. He cites versions from 1650 and 1701 and gives the following summary taken from an 1868 publication of stories in verse.

The devil makes a pact with a miserable fisherman to take his son in exchange for always having his nets full. To fulfill the pact, the fisherman must leave his

son exposed on a deserted island, but the devil is unable to claim his victim because Leombruno (the son) makes the sign of the cross. A beautiful fairy, in the form of an eagle, brings him to her castle and educates and marries him. He becomes a very famous warrior and goes to a great tournament held by the King of Granata, whose daughter is to be the prize, and he defeats all opponents. Then he boasts that he is already married to the most beautiful wife in the world and promises to let the king see her. The fairy arrives and reveals herself, but punishes her husband's indiscretion by stripping him of all his possessions and abandoning him. He desperately wanders the world looking for his wife and cleverly takes possession of a cloak that renders the wearer invisible and a pair of seven-league boots that enable one to run like the wind. This good fortune enables him to regain his wife and obtain her pardon.

A prose version appears in Imbriani, "La Novella di Leombruno," *La novellaja fiorentina*, followed by a version in verse. In *Italian Folktales*, Calvino emphasizes this tale's early roots in fourteenth-century ballads of chivalry, calling it "a complete story of human destiny, in the tradition of medieval romance." He prints a prose version from Potenza in Lucania taken from Comparetti, *Novelline popolari italiane*. The motifs of the magic purse, seven-league boots, and cloak of invisibility can be found in many European folk tales, including tales 26, 27, and 28 in this collection. The motif of the enchanted spouse vanishing as punishment to the protagonist for violating a prohibition is also common and used in "The King of Love" and "The Little Mouse with the Stinky Tail" among others in this collection.

### 32. King Animmulu—Lu Re d'Animmulu

Tale Type ATU 425—The Search for the Lost Husband and ATU 425E—The Enchanted Husband Sings Lullaby

This tale is a sub-type of the Cupid and Psyche story. Pitrè said it could have been placed next to "The King of Love" and that the opening motifs are similar to those of "The Slave" and "Rosemary." A distinctive attraction of this tale is the charming lullaby sung by the prince, which appears in several other places in Italian folk-tale tradition. Compare Basile, "Lo catenaccio," *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Imbriani, "Ombrion," *La novellaja milanese*; Gonzenbach, "Prince Scursuni," *Sicilianische Märchen*; Hahn, tale 31 in *Griechische und albenische Märchen*. Pitrè quotes the following version from his *Canti popolari siciliani*, vol. II, n. 732:

Si la mamma lu sapissi,  
 D'oru 'i fasci ti mittissi,  
 Si la mamma lu sapia,  
 D'oru 'i fasci ti mittia,  
 E a-la-vò!

The curious title, “King (of) Animmulu,” is hard to explain. It could mean “King (of) Spinning-Wheel,” perhaps connected to the fact that this enchanted king sings lullabies, normally a woman’s function, similar to spinning.

### 33. Tridicinu—Tridicinu

#### Tale Type ATU 328—The Boy Steals the Ogre’s Treasure

This is a fine example of the tale type familiar to English readers as “Jack in the Beanstalk.” The various Italian versions have the sequence of successful thefts reach a perfect climax in the task of stealing the ogre himself, a feature found also in Gonzenbach’s “The Story about Ciccu” and “Caruseddu,” *Sicilianische Märchen*. Pitрэ summarized a tale from Bisaquino in which Tredicinu, on his way to stealing the ogre’s golden curtain, meets an eagle, a lion, and an ant who ask him to arbitrate their dispute over some prey. Tredicinu’s division finds such favor that they each give him a gift: respectively a skin, a feather, and a foot, which aid him in carrying out his thefts. He concludes by stealing the ogre’s ring and finally the ogre himself. Luisa Rubini notes that this tale-type, although widely diffused throughout Europe, is not very old, appearing first in Basile’s “Corvetto,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*, which is quite similar but lacks the final task of capturing the ogre and bringing him back to the king.

Among other variants, Pitрэ cited Imbriani’s “Tredesin,” *La novellaja milanese*, in which Tredesin is a father of thirteen sons and succeeds in having the sorcerer’s thirteen sons killed in place of his own, then steals his bird, his bedcover full of little bells, and finishes his tricks by shutting the sorcerer up in a chest; and Widter and Wolf’s “Der listige Knecht,” *Volksmärchen aus Venetien*, in which Tredesin is the thirteenth son who manages to steal a blanket, an enchanted bird, and an enchanted horse. The next tale in Pitрэ’s collection, “The Enchanted Horse” (34), offers a more distant variant. Several motifs in “Tridicinu” are familiar in folk tales, such as the rivalry with brothers who think they can get rid of the hero by sending him on a dangerous mission. The motif of being fattened up to be eaten and deceiving the

ogre temporarily by displaying skinny objects is most familiar from the Grimms' "Hansel and Gretel."

#### 34. The Enchanted Horse—Lu cavaddu 'nfatatu

Tale Type ATU 327B—The Brothers and the Ogre, ATU 328—The Boy Steals the Ogre's Treasure, ATU 1119—The Ogre Kills his Mother (Wife), and ATU 531—The Clever Horse

Pitrè recalled that, in one of the versions he heard in Palermo when he was a boy, the tree was in the ground, and it was so tall that the top of the tree became lost in the sky. To succeed in his quest to fetch the golden hair, the young man was advised to take a hammer and two nails. He hit one of the nails into the trunk of the tree and got on top of it. Then he hit the next nail above him and mounted it. After mounting the second nail, he took out the first, hit it once more into the tree above him, and mounted it. He began climbing by hitting each nail one after the other and climbing hand by hand until he reached the golden hair that glistened marvelously, especially in the evening.

The beginning of the tale recalls the initial tale in Pitrè's collection, "The Tale Told Time and Again" and the variant that he included. The motif of the talking enchanted horse can be found in numerous tales in the Orient and Occident. Generally speaking, the horse is a helper, who assists the protagonist in achieving his goal. In some instances, the horse is transformed into a prince or princess or sacrifices itself for the welfare of the protagonist.

There are motifs in this narrative that can be found in other tale types such as the boy who steals the giant's treasure, the ogre who kills his own children, and Ferdinand the True and Ferdinand the False. Important literary versions are: Straparola, "Dalfreno re di Tunisi ha due figliuoli," *Le piacevoli notti*; *The History of Tom Thumb*, a chapbook (1621); Mme d'Aulnoy, "The Orange Tree and the Bee," *Les contes de fées*; Perrault, "Little Tom Thumb," *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*, and Grimm, "Thumbling," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1857). For other oral versions, see Gonzenbach, "Caruseddu," in *Sicilianische Märchen*.

### 35. The Story of a Queen—Lu cuntu di 'na riggina

Tale Type ATU 327B—The Brothers and the Ogre, ATU 328—The Boy Steals the Ogre's Treasure, ATU 1119—The Ogre Kills his Mother (Wife), and ATU 531—The Clever Horse

This tale bears many similarities to the previous tale, "The Enchanted Horse," except here the protagonist is a cunning woman, who manages to trick a sorcerer and his wife.

### 36. The Herb-Gatherer's Daughters—Li figghi di lu cavuliciddaru

Tale Type ATU 707—The Three Golden Children

Pitrè included the following variants:

*The Shirt of the Great Player and the Talking Bird (La cammisa di lu gran jucaturi e l'auceddu parlanti)*

A young prince married the daughter of a poor peasant against the will of the queen, his mother. A war broke out, and he had to depart leaving his pregnant wife behind. During his absence she gave birth to thirteen babies, twelve boys and one girl, who was extraordinarily beautiful. The queen mother had them killed and thrown into a garden. Afterward, she wrote her son that his wife had given birth to dogs not children. She sent the wife to work turning the wheel of a salt mill. In the garden twelve oranges and a lemon tree arose. A goatherd passed by, and a goat ate them. Soon thereafter the goat gave birth to the same thirteen babies, twelve boys and a girl. As they grew up, they often quarreled with the children of the goatherd, and so they chose to depart and seek their fortune. Along the way they met an old man, who gave them a magic wand, and after they struck the ground with it, they—unaware of their royal birth—asked immediately for a beautiful palace to be built in front of the palace of the king, who was their father. The old queen mother realized that they might be her grandchildren, and this was why the king was irresistibly attracted to them and why he wished them well. So, she sent them an ugly old woman to do the housekeeping and keep an eye on the innocent children. The old woman told them that, despite all the rare things they had in their palace, they were missing "the shirt of the great player." Immediately, the youngest of the brothers departed, and even though it was a great risk to his life, he succeeded in obtaining it. Next the old woman noticed that "the

dancing water” was missing, and it, too, was found. Finally, the next to last of the brothers had to go in search of “the talking bird.” This quest was dangerous because he was turned into stone. Before the tenth brother left, he gave a vase of carnations to the other brothers and said that the wilting of the carnations would be a sign that he had been turned into stone. The carnations wilted, and the ninth brother departed. They wilted, and then it was the eighth brother’s turn followed by the seventh until the first departed. Finally the sister had to go.

The old woman was relieved by the disappearance of the grandchildren, while the king lamented that they had vanished. The sister who had been advised to be silent, took the talking bird and freed her brothers. When they returned to the palace, the king was happy to see them again and invited them to dinner. The bird wanted to go with them, and when the food was served, the bird tasted the dishes one by one and found them all poisoned except for the king’s plate. Then the bird declared that the ugly old woman and the queen mother had planned all this.

Once the entire mystery was revealed, the poor queen, the mother of the children, was released, while the old woman and the queen mother were burned at the stake.

*Collected in Montevago.*

### *The Sun and the Moon (Suli e Luna)*

There were once three sisters, and the youngest was the most beautiful of them all. A king fell in love with her and took her for his wife. The sisters were jealous. When the queen became pregnant, her husband had to leave the realm. The sisters took the newly born babies and replaced them with dogs. The king condemned his innocent wife, and she was spat upon by everyone who passed by her. The babies, who had been abandoned, were picked up by a saint, who raised them and opened a beautiful jewelry shop for them. The aunts sent old Cristina to tell them that their perfect shop lacked the talking bird, the dancing water, and the musical apple. The boy, whose name was Sun, departed. He met three hermits along the way, and the last one advised him not to respond to the bird no matter what bad things the bird might say. But when the bird started calling his sister Moon a whore, Sun spoke out resentfully and was turned into stone. Then Moon departed, and she succeeded in capturing the bird when it became tired of insulting her and finally surrendered. Then she collected the slaver and foam from the bird’s mouth and made an ointment to revive her brother. Together they returned to their home. In the meantime, the king took pity on his wife and pardoned her, and

one day, while they were on a walk, they went into Sun and Moon's store to buy some jewels. Their father and mother felt a strong affection for the two young people. Then the talking bird revealed the entire mystery. This was how the parents recognized their children, and they sent the jealous sisters, who had caused all the misery, into exile.

*Collected in Capaci.*

### *Gold Drop and Golden Diana (Stilla d'oru e stilla Diana)*

A prince married the daughter of a rich peasant, and when his wife was about to give birth, he left her to go off to war. Then she gave birth to two babies, Gold Drop and Golden Diana. The prince's mother informed her son that his wife gave birth to two dogs instead of children. Consequently, he ordered the dogs to be put to death. The old queen mother sent the children to be thrown into the sea. A woman gathered the chest from the sea and kept the children for seven years at which point they left her because they kept quarreling with the woman's own children. They wandered until they found a little cottage in the country where a woman took them in and treated them as her own children for years. After the king had returned from the war, he banished his unfortunate wife who had been slandered by his own mother. One day he went hunting and happened upon the cottage in the country. When he saw the beautiful young woman and man, he felt a great affection for them. He led them back to his court along with the woman who had raised them as her children. At dinner this woman revealed the mystery. Therefore the king called for his wife the queen, who had been slandered, and punished his mother. The woman who revealed everything was a fairy, and afterward, she disappeared.

*Collected in Casteltermini.*

### *The Turkish King (Lu Re turcu)*

The three marvelous things that the aunts suggest to the children of the king are: the talking bird, the dancing water, and the singing tree (*l'acieddu chi parra, l'acqua ch'addanza e l'arburu ca canta*). The children who are cast into the sea by the aunts are saved and cared for by a Turkish king.

*Collected in Noto.*

There is another version of this tale, "Re Sonnu" in Pitre's *Nuovo saggio di fiabe e novelle*. Moreover, it has many other important oral and literary sources: Fiorentino, *Il pecorone*; Foriano Pico, *Historia della Regina Oliva, figlia*

di Giuliano Imperatore e moglie del rè di castiglia. Ad istanza, et esempio delle persone devote e timorate di Dio. Data in luce; Straparola, "Ancilotto, re di Provino," *Le piacevoli notti*; Basile, "Cerva fatata," *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Lippi and Minucci, *Mamantile riacquistato*; Sarnelli, "La 'ngannatrice 'Ngannata," in *Posilecheata di Pompeo Sarnelli*; Mme d'Aulnoy, "La Princesse Belle-Étoile et le Prince Chéry," *Suite des contes nouveaux ou des fées à la mode*; Le Noble, "L'Oiseau de vérité," *Le gage touché, histoires galantes*; Gozzi, *La 'ngannatrice* in *Opere ed inedite*; Galland, "Histoire de deux soeurs jalouses de leur cadette," *Les milles et une nuit*; Grimm, "De drei Vügelkens," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*; Comparetti, "L'uccellino che parla," *Novelline popolari italiane*; Gonzenbach, "The Banished Queen and her Two Abandoned Children," *Sicilianische Märchen*; De Gubernatis, "I cagnolini" and "Il re di Napoli," *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*; Knust, "Die Königstochter und die Bauerntochter," *Italienische Märchen*; Imbriani, "L'uccellino che parla" and "L'uccel bel verde," *La novellaja fiorentina*; Imbriani, "La reginna in del desért" and "L'esempi di trii fradej," *La novellaja milanese*; Bernoni, "Pese-can" and "Sipro, Candia e Morea," *Fiabe popolari veneziane*; Arietti, "I tre fratei alla steila dör" and "Storia dël merlo bianc, dla funtana d'argent e dël erbolin che soúna," *Novelle popolari piemontesi*; Coronedi-Bertini, "La Fola d'la maledizioni di set fiú," *Novelle popolari bolognesi*; and Schneller, "Die drei Schönheiten der Welt," *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*.

Though this fairy tale may have originated in the Orient, the source is not clear. Straparola's version was widely known by the French writers at the end of the seventeenth century, and it is certainly the source of d'Aulnoy's and Le Noble's tales. However, it may have even influenced Galland's version. His tale of "The Two Sisters Who Envied their Younger Sister" was told to him in Paris by a Maronite Christian Arab from Aleppo named Youhenna Diab or Hanna Diab. There was no Arabic manuscript for this tale, and Galland created it from memory after listening to Diab and may have introduced elements from the European tales he knew. His tale of "The Two Sisters" in *The Thousand and One Nights* and d'Aulnoy's tale of "La Princesse Belle-Étoile" had an influence through the French and German eighteenth-century chapbooks (*Bibliothèque Bleue* and *Blaue Bibliothek*) in Europe and in England. Justus Heinrich Saal published his version entitled "Der wahrredende Vogel" ("The Truth-Speaking Bird") in his book *Abendstunden in lehrreichen und anmuthungen Erzählungen*, and there was also a Scottish adaptation in *Popular Ballads* (1806). The Grimms' source was a tale told in 1813 by a shepherd in a Westphalian dialect, indicating how widespread the fairy tale had also become in the oral tradition. There tend to be four crucial components in the plot of this tale: 1) the wishes of the sisters; 2) the envy of the two older

sisters and/or mother-in-law; 3) the abandonment of the children and unjust punishment of the mother; 4) the reunion of the family often brought about by a singing bird or some magic gift. The bird that reveals the truth is a common motif in many fairy tales throughout the world and can be found in numerous collections of European folk tales.

### 37. Rosemary—Rosamarina

Tale Type ATU 407—The Girl as Flower

Similar to Giambattista Basile's "Mortella," *Lo cunto de li cunti*.

### 38. The Magic Balls—Li palli magichi

Tale Type ATU 432—The Prince as Bird

This tale is probably of Arabic origin, and once the vain king dies, it follows the traditional plotline that can be found in Apuleius's "Cupid and Psyche": the queen falls in love with the prince; her chambermaid causes her to betray him; the prince vanishes with his wounds; she travels to cure him; they are reunited in the end.

For other variants, see Bernoni, "El re de Fava," *Fiabe popolari veneziane*, and Imbriani, "Petru lu massariotu" and "El pegorée," *La novellaja milanese*.

### 39. The Empress Rosina—Rusina 'Mperatrici

Tale Type ATU 425—The Search for the Lost Husband, ATU 425A—The Animal as Bridegroom, ATU 884—A Forsaken Fiancée: Service as Menial

Pitrè published three Sicilian variants.

### *The King of Portugal (Lu Re di Portugallu)*

A merchant, the father of three maidens, takes a business trip. After he forgets to buy a rose for Elisabetta, the third daughter, he returns to the city where he has some business. He comes upon a palace where he finds a well-furnished table. A slave is ready to serve him, but the merchant wants to help himself, and he descends with a silk ladder into a well to fetch water. There he finds a vase of roses, and he takes two for Elisabetta but must promise an

invisible person to deliver Elisabetta to him. When he returns to the main floor, the merchant finds as much gold as he could ever desire and departs. Later he comes back with Elisabetta, and an animal appears that asks for her love. She refuses. At the end of some months she receives permission from the animal to attend her sister's wedding on the condition that she returns to him. Indeed, she returns to him within four days. After some more months pass, she departs to see her dying father, and the animal makes her promise not to tear her hair. Elisabetta goes, but because she is so distressed by the death of her father, she tears her hair. When she returns to the palace, she does not find the animal anymore and goes in search of him crying out:

My ferocious animal	Armàru filòcicu miu,
If I find you alive	Siddu vivu ti truvassi,
Even as animal I'll marry you.	Iu, d'armàru ti spusassi.

She searches for him everywhere until she finds him. The animal becomes a handsome young man, and she marries him. (This tale is similar to "Re d'Amuri.")

*Collected in Noto.*

### *The Tale of Fortunata (La favula di Furtunata)*

In this version a magician gives a bunch of spurs to the father of Fortunata, a beautiful maiden, so that he can speed up his return to his country. Of the three sisters, Rosina, Angelica, and Fortunata, the merchant's daughters, only Fortunata goes to live with the monster, who asks her in the course of three days, "Fortunata, will you marry me?" She always remains confused and silent, but on the third day, she descends into the garden where she finds the monster on the ground beneath the rose bush, almost dead. Taking pity on him, she says: "Get up. I'll marry you!" The magic spell is broken, and the monster becomes a handsome young man.

*Collected in Acireale.*

### *Billina*

A merchant is compelled to cast away his goods three times. The monster is a magician who has been enchanted by a fairy. The monster says that the enchantment will only end when a maiden says that she wants to marry him. He has been this way for eighteen years and is the son of the Emperor of China.

*Collected in Cianciana.*

This tale is similar to “The Pig King” in Gonzenbach’s *Sicilianische Märchen* and forms part of the well-known Beast-Bridegroom cycle that has its literary antecedent in the Roman writer Apuleius’s “Cupid and Psyche,” *The Golden Ass*, which appeared in the middle of the second century. The most important literary versions of this tale, which was widespread in Europe and the Orient, are: Straparola, “Galeotto,” *Le piacevoli notti*; Basile, “Lo serpe,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Mme d’Aulnoy, “Le Mouton,” *Les contes de fées* and “Le Prince Marcassin,” *Suite des contes nouveaux ou des fées à la mode*; Mme de Murat, “Le Roy Porc,” *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques*; Bignon, “Zeineb,” *Les aventures d’Abdalla*; Mme Le Prince de Beaumont, “La Belle et la Bête,” *Magasin des enfans*; Lamb, *Beauty and the Beast, or, a Rough Outside with a Gentle Heart*; Grimm, “The Singing, Springing Lark” and “Hans My Hedgehog,” *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*; Gonzenbach, “Zafarana,” “King Cardiddu,” and “Prince Scursini,” *Sicilianische Märchen*; Imbriani, “Zelinda e il mostro,” *La novellaja fiorentina*; and Gradi, “Téa Tècla,” *Saggio di letture varie*.

#### 40. The Little Mouse with the Stinky Tail—Lu surciteddu cu la cuda fitusa

Tale Type ATU 425—The Search for the Lost Husband and ATU 425A—The Animal as Bridegroom

Although Pitrè offered no parallels, it is clear that this tale is close to the Grimms’ “The Frog Prince.” Moreover, the theme of the “animal groom” (a suitor who comes in frightening or repulsive animal form but is finally released from enchantment, revealed as royal, and marries the heroine) is known throughout the world. Our version is distinctive for its use of pitiful lamentation sung by the heroine as she wanders in search of her lost mouse, whom she initially despised but now (in a surprisingly instant conversion) desperately longs for. It is her long penance—comprising wandering, isolation, physical hardship, persistence, and willingness to follow orders she cannot fathom—that earns her the reunion with her enchanted groom.

#### 41. The Little Lamb—La picureda

Tale Type ATU 510—Cinderella and Peau d’Âne and ATU 510A—Cinderella

See the following important literary variants: Basile, “The Cat Cenerentola,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Perrault, “Cinderella, or The Glass Slipper,” *Histoires ou*

*contes du temps passé*; Mme d'Aulnoy, "Finette Cendron," *Les contes de fées*; and Grimm, "Cinderella," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.

There are thousands of oral and literary versions of "Cinderella," one of the most popular fairy tales in the world. Early versions may have originated in ancient China or Egypt. The shoe or slipper test may have been connected to a marriage custom in which the bridegroom takes off the bride's old shoes and replaces them with new ones. But this thesis has never been completely verified, and depending on the society and customs, shoes are used in many different ways in marriage celebrations. In the various literary versions the shoes are leather, gold, silver, and glass. Perrault invented the glass slippers most likely as an ironic joke since a glass slipper was likely to break if it were to fall off a foot. What most of the tales, oral and literary, have in common is the conflict between a young girl and her stepmother and siblings about her legacy. Cinderella must prove that she is the rightful successor in a house in which she has been deprived of her rights. She receives help from her dead mother in the guise of doves, fairies, and godmothers. Belief in the regeneration of the dead who can help the living in the form of plants or animals underlies one of the key motifs of the fairy tale. In the European literary tradition, which first began with Bonaventure des Périers' *Les nouvelles recreations et joyeux devis* (*New Recreations and Joyous Games*, 1558), it is clear that Basile played a role in influencing Perrault and d'Aulnoy, who, in turn, had some effect on the Grimms' tale. Significant in Basile's tale is the active role that Cinderella plays in determining her future: she kills her stepmother and stops her father's ship from returning from Sardinia. Some of this activism, in contrast to Perrault's narrative, can be seen in the Grimms' version. Since there were so many different versions by the time that the Grimms composed their "Cinderella"—for instance, they may have also been influenced by the Bohemian version "Laskopal und Miliwaka" in *Sagen der böhmischen Vorzeit aus einigen Gegenden alter Schlösser und Dörfer* (1808)—it is difficult to establish one source for their work in particular. Clearly, many different literary and oral tales fostered a huge Cinderella cycle in the East and the West. Alan Dundes's *Cinderella: A Folklore Casebook* provides valuable background information and discussions about the cycle and different interpretations. The early literary work of Basile, Mme d'Aulnoy, and the Grimms certainly played a role in the creation of nineteenth-century plays and musical adaptations such as Nicolas Isouard's popular fairy opera, *Cendrillon* (1810) as well as in the equally successful operas, *La Cenerentola* (1817) by Gioacchino Antonio Rossini and *Cendrillon* (1896) by Jules Massenet.

## 42. Date, Oh Beautiful Date—Gràttula-Beddàtula

Tale Type ATU 510A—Cinderella and ATU 480—The Kind and Unkind Girls

Although there are two or more tale types mixed in this story, the primary plot is evidently based on “Cinderella.” See the previous note for the most important literary versions and comments.

## 43. Pilusedda—Pilusedda

Tale Type ATU 510—Cinderella and Peau d’Âne and Tale Type ATU 510B—Peau d’Asne

In the western world the theme of incest took on significance in literature during the eleventh century. Stories dealing with this topic that may have influenced Straparola, Basile, Perrault, and the Grimms appeared in Ser Giovanni Fiorentino’s *Il pecorone* as “Dionigia and the King of England” (1385) and in the fifteenth-century verse romance of *Belle Hélène de Constantinople*, of which there are also prose manuscripts. It became a very popular story and was published in chapbooks and folk collections up to the nineteenth century. There is generally one plot outline followed in most of the publications: The Emperor Antoine of Constantinople falls in love with his daughter Hélène and manages to obtain a papal dispensation so that he may be allowed to marry her. However, Hélène flees to England before the wedding and meets King Henry but does not reveal that she is from a royal family and why she has fled Constantinople. Henry falls in love with her and marries her against his mother’s wishes. When the Pope is besieged by the Saracens, Henry goes off to war to help him. While he is absent, Hélène gives birth to twins, but the queen mother sends a message to her son that Hélène has brought two monsters into the world. Henry writes back that Hélène is to be kept under guard, but his mother changes his message into an execution order. When the Duke of Gloucester, who is the acting regent, reads the order, he has Hélène’s right hand chopped off as proof that he has slain her. In reality he sends her off in a boat with her two sons and hangs the hand around the youngest son’s neck. In the meantime, he has the hand of his own niece chopped off as replacement, and she is also burned at the stake. After a shipwreck, Hélène’s sons are abducted by a wolf and lion who bring them to a hermit who names the boy with the hand around his neck Brac and the other Lion. Meanwhile, Hélène makes her way to Nantes. When Henry learns about Hélène’s fate from the

Duke of Gloucester, he has his mother executed. By chance he meets the Emperor Antoine, who is looking for his daughter. Together Henry and Antoine search for Hélène for a year. At the same time, Brac and Lion commence their quest for their mother. When they come to Tours, they enter the service of the Archbishop Martin de Tours, who names them Brice and Martin. Unknown to all, Hélène has also moved to Tours. When Henry and Antoine encounter Brice and Martin in Tours, they notice the hand around one of the boy's necks, and Henry is united with his sons. Soon Hélène comes upon them and she is reunited with her sons, father, and husband, and her hand is restored to her through a miracle. Many of the motifs in this legend stem from Byzantine and Greek tales and medieval legends. There is some connection to the marriage customs in the ruling houses in the pre-Hellenistic period. Other important sources are the legend of the famous eighth-century King Offa, John Gower's *Confesso Amantis*, written in the fourteenth century, and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1387–89). The father's incestuous desire has always been depicted as sinful, and the second half of the story, the transformation of the princess into a mutilated person or squalid, animal-like servant, has parallels with the Cinderella tales. However, for the most part the heroine is a princess, and the plot revolves around her fall from and return to royalty. Her purity and integrity are tested, and she proves through a ring or shoe test that she is worthy of her rank. Depending on the attitude of the writer, the incestuous father is punished or forgiven. Sometimes he is just forgotten. Some of the key versions are: Straparola, "Tebaldo," *Le piacevoli notti*; Basile, "The Bear," *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Perrault, "Donkey-Skin," *Griseldis, nouvelle. Avec le conte de Peau d'Ane, et celui des souhaits ridicules*; Grimm, "All Fur," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.

According to Pitrè, the Brothers Grimm based their version on a story that was embedded in Carl Nehrlich's novel, *Schilly* (1798). Other literary versions that are related to the topic are Musäus's "Die Nympe des Brunnens," *Volksmärchen der Deutschen* (1782) and Albert Ludwig Grimm's "Brunnenhold und Brunnenstark," *Lina's Märchenbuch*. There is an old Scottish oral version "The King Who Wished to Marry His Daughter," published in John Francis Campbell, ed., *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*. See also Gonzenbach's "Betta Pilusa," *Sicilianische Märchen*; Imbriani, "La scindirouera," *La novellaja milanese*, and "Verdea" and "Cenerentola" in *La novellaja fiorentina*; Bernoni, "Conzasenare," *Fiabe popolari veneziane*; Schneller, "Aschenbrödel," *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*; Calvino's "Wooden Maria," *Italian Folk Tales*, is a composite of a tale collected by Giggi Zanazzo, *Novelle, favole e leggende romanesche* and several other versions.

Most of the tales dealing with incest are also clearly related to another cycle

of tales concerned with “The Maiden without Hands.” One of the key literary sources here is Philippe de Rémi’s verse romance *La Manekine* (c. 1270), which may have been based on oral tales in Brittany connected to the motif of the persecuted woman.

In her essay, “The Donkey-Skin Folktale Cycle (AT 510B),” Christine Goldberg demonstrates that the tales about incest, which she calls the Donkey-Skin cycle, are also connected to the Cinderella cycle, and she also pays a great deal of attention to other motifs such as the King Lear motif of Love Like Salt, the old woman’s skin and disguised flayer, the hiding box, and the spying. However, she does not deal with the legend of *Belle Hélène*, which clearly is crucial for understanding the historical background of incest tales. Other versions of this tale type can be found in the works of Waldau, Schleicher, Grundtvig, and Gonzenbach.

Pitrè was aware of many local variants in Sicily and published the following summaries.

### *Fidi and Cridi*

The Emperor of Austria had two daughters named Fidi and Cridi (Faith and Belief). His wife, on her death-bed, left him her ring and made him promise to marry the woman whose little finger was the appropriate size. Fidi saw it and tried it on, and her father decided to marry her. She asked for a two-week delay, shut herself inside a gilded wooden chest together with her sister Cridi and many provisions, and had the chest cast out to sea. It was found by the King of Portugal, who took it back to his palace for all his court to admire. When the provisions ran out, Fidi came out and found food. She did this twice more until the king caught her and made her his bride. The King of Austria attended the wedding, recognized his daughter, and put a curse on her: “You will turn into a lizard for a year, a month, and a day. Then you must call at your sister Cridi’s window three times, at midnight, and if she answers you, you can turn back into a young maiden. Otherwise, you will remain a lizard forever.”

Fidi recounted all this to Cridi and made her take her place as the king’s bride. Then she made her promise not to sleep with him and to answer whoever called at her window in a year, a month, and a day. When the time came, and Fidi called three times, Cridi was asleep. But the king woke her up. She leaped from her bed and opened her window and answered. Fidi, restored to her youthful form, came to the palace and revealed the whole story, and they all lived happily ever after.

*Collected in Casteltermini.*

### *Truvaturedda*

Truvaturedda comes to the king encased in a cask of wood and declares herself skilled at two tasks: touching the hens' behinds to determine when they are going to lay eggs, and preparing their mash. When the young king takes her into his residence, she always sits in the ashes. Whenever the king goes to the ball, she unwinds three magic balls of colored thread one after the other and gets whatever she wishes. At the ball she dances three times with the king and steals three diamonds that he carries on his chest, which makes the king sick with grief. She then sends him the diamonds baked inside bread that she has made with her own hands.

*Collected in Capaci.*

### 44. The Little Magpie—La ciaulidda

This story could possibly be categorized as a variant of Tale Type ATU 400—The Man on a Quest for His Lost Wife, which includes women transformed into birds.

Pitrè noted other versions in De Gubernatis, "*Le Novelline di Santo Stefano*"; Gradi, *Saggio di lettere varie per i Giovani*, and Köhler, *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*. He indicated that the present tale had very few details and incidents and was somewhat infantile.

### 45. The Doe—La cerva

Tale Type ATU 510B—Peau d'Asne

See the note for "Pilusedda," tale 43.

### 46. The Humpback—La jimmuruta

Tale Type ATU 402—The Animal Bride

There is a Florentine version, "I tre fratelli," in Imbriani's *La novellaja fiorentina* that is worth noting. In this tale there are three sons, and the father is not a king. The father promises the house and legacy to the son whose wife can pass three tests: 1) whoever sews the best shirt; 2) whoever can best weave a certain amount of flax; 3) whoever can best furnish her own apartment and with the best taste. The frog, the wife of Cecchino, little Francesco, wins the test. She is an enchanted princess.

#### 47. The Tailor and the Dung-Maiden—Lu custrieri

This strange little tale lacks evident parallels, although it represents a misogynistic tradition with ancient roots in the Mediterranean. A poem of the ancient Greek poet Semonides of Amorgos (c. 600 B.C.) begins by saying that Zeus created the race of women from different elements or animals—mud, the sea, the pig, the weasel, etc.—and that each woman keeps the essential quality of her origin (and all are negative except one). A faint echo may be detected here that suggests female nature is inherently vile and can be improved only by a male's efforts.

The motif of the queen who refuses to answer questions about her origins is found in several places, including Imbriani, "La regina superba," *La novellaja milanese*; Coronedi-Berti, "Fola dla malediziòn di sèt fiu," *Novelle popolari bolognesi*; and Gonzenbach, "The Daughter of the Sun," *Sicilianische Märchen*.

#### 48. Angelica's Ring—L'aneddu d'Anelica

This tale, like "The Barber's Clock," which follows, is not a typical folk tale but rather a theological folk allegory, perhaps related to an exemplum. There is no hero or heroine and no story in the usual sense; it is an account of how a specific evil came into the world and how it operates upon human society. There is humor in the devils' initial complaint and discussion of how to "boost business" for hell, and in the word-play used in making up the devils' names. But then the tale develops a grim moral tone as it lists the series of evils produced by the ring and describes the frightening presence of Angelica in our world. "This is no fairy tale . . . Angelica is still alive" conveys a terrible tone of conviction at the end.

#### 49. The Barber's Clock—Lu roggiu di lu varveri

Like the preceding tale, this is best described as a theological allegory or exemplum. Pitrè's friend and collaborator, Salvatore Salomone-Marino, sent the following addendum to Pitrè:

Who doesn't see clearly that this remarkable clock, which never tires, answers so wisely to the various men who question it, and remains beyond their reach, is the sun? And the Master who made it, the ancient who draws praise from everyone for his sublime creation, is no other than God. His works reveal His existence. For all its modest simplicity, what a wise tale this one is!

This tale is a wonderful invention, deeply serious in its moral message yet playful and witty in its social caricatures and its brilliant poetry, which is trenchantly rhythmic and rhymed in the original. Calvino, much taken with this tale, especially its verse, remarked: “Although I do not always champion oral and popular poetry over literary poetry, here is truly a case where a miracle must be proclaimed: we are on the level of the great moments of allegorical poetry” (*Italian Folktales*). The all-pervasive allegory is indeed impressive. While there is no doubt that the clock’s maker is God, we think it more plausible to see the clock as representing not the sun but the world itself, or more precisely, the rules or “mechanism” that govern God’s world in which we live. Pitrè observed that nearly all the sun’s answers are traditional proverbs. The clock’s wisdom, therefore, is the irrefutable truth of the human condition, while those who come to the clock as petitioners represent specimens of humanity in all its limitations, helpless before the implacable laws that govern their lives.

#### 50. Give Me the Veil!—Dammi lu velu!

Tale Type ATU 936\*—The Golden Mountain, ATU 400—The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife, and ATU 465—The Man Persecuted Because of his Beautiful Wife

This story follows the first tale type (936\*) only in its opening, then switches to the other two types. The magical figure the hero encounters is given the unusual name Grecu-livanti, or Levantine Greek, otherwise known as a bogeyman.

A more complex version of the same story can be found in Gonzenbach, “About Joseph, Who Set Out to Seek His Fortune,” *Sicilianische Märchen*. The motif of stealing the dress of one of the bathing fairies is found in “Burdilluni” (tale 61 in this collection) and in Imbriani’s “El re del sol,” *La novellaja milanese*.

#### 51. The Little Monk—Lu munacheddu

This tale shows some awkwardness in style and structure, not surprising since the narrator was 8 years old. Pitrè’s note deserves quoting in full:

This is the last of five tales told to me in Erice by the little girl Maria Curatolo, who told tale 1, “The Tale Told Time and Again.” The teller wanted to emphasize the frightening nature of the tale. I would have grouped it with the children’s stories,

had I not heard it also told by the girl's mother, who assured me that it was serious and not to be taken lightly.

The connection to the Cyclops tale in Homer's *Odysseus* is clear, and there is also a connection to one of the Grimms' tales that is not widely known. The brothers' apparent admiration for cunning heroes was such that they could not bring themselves to condemn or punish a hero for being a thief. In "The Robber and His Sons," which appeared in the fifth and sixth editions of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in 1843 and 1850, but was omitted in the final 1857 edition because it was too closely related to the Polyphemus tale in *The Odyssey*, a famous retired robber/thief recounts three adventures in order to save his sons, who had disregarded his advice against becoming robbers and tried to follow in his footsteps by stealing a horse from the queen. They are captured by the queen's men, and only by telling the queen three extraordinary tales about his days as a great robber can the father gain clemency for his sons. One of the adventures concerns his entrapment in a cave by a giant (similar to Odysseus' plight with Polyphemus) and how he managed to outwit the giant by escaping in a sheepskin. Aesthetically speaking, the text as composed by Wilhelm employs a framework similar to the one used in *A Thousand and One Nights*. Here the third-person narrative shifts to the more personal first-person narrative—in effect, a strategy for emancipation, a plea. The father adroitly uses his words to conjure pictures of his unusual adventures and thereby gains the freedom of his three sons. Cunning is again exemplified in the figure of a thief as narrator, and the Grimms represented him as the spirit of bourgeois entrepreneurship and civilization more than a thief. For a comprehensive analysis of the Polyphemus tradition and the place of the Grimms' "The Robber and His Sons" within it, see Lutz Röhrich, "Die mittelalterlichen Redaktionen des Polyphem-Märchens und ihr Verhältnis zur außerhomerischen Tradition," in Röhrich, *Sage und Märchen: Erzählforschung heute*. In 1857, the very year in which "The Robber and His Sons" was eliminated from *Children's and Household Tales*, Wilhelm held a talk in the Berlin Academy of Sciences entitled "Die Sage von Polyphem" ("The Legend of Polyphemus"), in which he drew comparisons between ten similar legends and myths based on the Polyphemus material. The main point of the talk was to prove that, despite major differences between the versions, they all stemmed from a primeval myth, an *Urmythos*, that dealt with the origins of the world and the struggle between good and evil forces personified by a "good" dwarf or little man and an "evil" giant, whose one eye is a mark of his divine origins that he has betrayed.

## 52. The Tuft of Wild Beet—La troffa di la razza

## Tale Type ATU 325—The Magician and His Pupil

For variants, see Pitrè's "L'omu cavaddu," "Li 'nfatati," and "Li dui studenti di la magaria" in *Fiabe e novelle popolari siciliane*. For similar tales in the literary tradition, see Straparola, "Maestro Lattantation," *Le piacevoli notti*; Le Noble, "L'Apprenti magicien," *Le gage touché, histoires galantes*; Grimm, "The Thief and his Master," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.

The focus in most of the variants of the tale type is on the competition between an apprentice and his master. They are somewhat related to the tales about master thieves, except here the master/apprentice situation is the determining factor in the plot. Generally speaking there is a contest to see who can be most inventive in transforming himself into some kind of an animal, and often it is a battle until death. Similar folk tales can be traced back to the Orient, and they were also widespread in the Celtic tradition. An important source is Jean de Boves' fourteenth-century collection of fabliaux *De Barât e de Haimet*. It includes a farcical tale of one thief stealing from a thief who is stealing eggs from a bird's nest. Sometimes the competition is between two sorcerers or magicians, but for the most part, the European literary tales depict a young man who seeks to liberate himself as magician or thief from an older man. The apprentice often receives some help from the magician's daughter, providing that he promises to take her away and marry her because she wants to escape her father's demonic powers. It is not certain whether Straparola was influenced here by the oral tradition, but Le Noble clearly knew Straparola's tale and stylized it according to the French taste of his time. The names that he chose lend it an allegorical flavor. The romantic literary treatment of this theme, which was transformed into a tale about artistic dedication, is best exemplified in E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Rat Krespel" ("Councillor Krespel," 1819). In 1857 Ludwig Bechstein published a fairy-tale, "Der Zauber-Wettkampf" ("The Magic Contest"), which is closer to the plot of the Grimms' tale and concerns a bookbinder's apprentice who outwits his master.

## 53. Virgil the Sorcerer—Lu magu Virgillu

Pitrè refers to Domenico Comparetti's magisterial study, *Virgilio nel medio-evo* (Virgil in the Middle Ages). In volume 2, Comparetti discusses the figure of Virgil in the folk-legend tradition, where a parallel may be found to the Virgil of our tale. It is noteworthy that the narrator twice intervenes to express

sympathy for the suffering of Virgil's wife. This tendency runs counter to the dominant misogynistic tone of the tale, as does the earlier statement that even the devils felt sorry for her. We are seeing a gradual shift of emphasis from the bad character of the woman to that of Virgil. The negative view of Virgil is strengthened when he is refused admission to hell and reaches its climax in the frightening vision of the apocalypse that awaits those who find his tomb.

#### 54. The Devil—Lu diavulu Zuppiddu

##### Tale Type ATU 1164—The Devil and the Evil Woman

The ending is taken from a religious and poetic legend sung by storytellers, and for the most part it was adapted in a comical sense as can be seen in Bernoni's "El Diavolo," *Fiabe popolari veneziane*.

Pitrè notes that another tale, which contained more details about the pretensions of the wife, was told in Borgetto with the title "The Devil's Wife," and it described a wife who was much more troublesome and more proud than the devil, whom she forced to flee the city.

This tale may stem from Niccolò Machiavelli's *Novella di Belfagor arcidiavolo* (*The Novella of Belfagor Archdevil*, 1520). Belfagor is sent by Pluto to the world with the task of finding a wife. He takes a wife, but he cannot endure her vanity and pride and prefers to return to the underworld. So, he goes back to hell without a wife.

Machiavelli's tale may have been adapted from the same one published in Giovanni Brevio's *Rime e prose volgari*, published five years earlier in 1515, but this tale may have been written by Machiavelli. There is some dispute about the authorship of the tale that Pitrè discusses in his note. Straparola also published a version of the tale in *Le piacevoli notti* as did Francesco Sansovino in *Cento novelle* (1561).

#### 55. The Fairy Princess's Midwife—La mammana di la Principissa-fata

This tale has a great deal in common with Tale Type ATU 476—Midwife in the Underworld, in which a midwife is summoned to help a supernatural being. It clearly reflects a society where midwifery was a major activity and may be seen as an idealized portrait of the loyal and affectionate bonds that could form between midwife and mother. It is one of the few tales in Pitrè's collection where generosity and goodwill inform the entire narrative, with no place for jealousy, covetousness, or ill-will of any kind.

## 56. The Serpent—Lu sirpenti

## Tale Type ATU 425A—The Monster (Animal) as Bridegroom

See the note to tale 39, “The Empress Rosina.”

In Sicilian folklore the snake was considered extremely dangerous, and if one looked into the eyes of a snake, it could paralyze the person. Another aspect of Sicilian folklore in Gonzenbach’s variant about Prince Scursini (see the reference below) is the preference for women to “cure” the prince rather than doctors. The Sicilian peasants placed more trust in female healers than doctors.

Pitrè included the following variants and versions.

*King Horse (Re Cavallu)*

A king and a queen wish to have a son but a horse is born instead. The horse desires to get married. He is given a maiden from the lower classes. That night she tells him who she is, and the horse kills her. The same thing happens to the second wife, who is the sister of the first maiden. The third uses her wiles to capture his heart and manages to convince him that she is of noble lineage. She succeeds in getting him to tell her what is necessary to transform him into a man. And she proceeds to do what is necessary. She enters an extremely narrow alley and cleans away the spider webs and dirt. In the middle of the alley she encounters ferocious people who abuse and mistreat her. At the end of the alley they want to harm her, but the walls say that, until then, nobody had been so kind to them as the beautiful girl. So she is saved, and her husband, the horse, assumes the form of a man.

*Collected in Ficarazelli.*

*The Pig King (Re Porcu)*

The wife of the pig king is invited to a ball during the time that she is enjoying her husband as a man, and for three nights she is treated with derision as the wife of a pig. She is almost disgraced because she rashly seeks the company of women who have married well. The third night, however, she loses her patience and forgets the instructions to keep the pig king’s secret. She declares that her husband appears as a pig during the day and a handsome man at night. Once she says this, her husband disappears.

*Collected in Montevago.*

### *The Serpent King (Re Scursini)*

A father, who has remained a widower, promises his daughter that he will marry only when a pair of shoes under his bed and a cap behind a trunk fall apart. The maiden receives advice from her mother and goes to the royal palace to help the queen as midwife. She needs two pairs of shoes, twenty child's frocks, twenty petticoats, twenty shirts, twenty handkerchiefs, and a pair of iron gloves in order to assist the queen in giving birth to a snake. As soon as it is born, the snake is placed in the middle of a tub of pure lime and thus lives.

*Collected in Noto.*

The most important literary versions of this tale are: Straparola, "Galeotto," *Le piacevoli notti*; Basile, "Lo serpe," *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Mme d'Aulnoy, "The Ram," *Les contes de fées* and "Prince Marcassin," *Suite des contes nouveaux ou des fées à la mode*; Murat, "King Pork," *Histoires sublimes et allégoriques*; Bignon, "Zeineb," *Les aventures d'Abdalla*; Mme Le Prince de Beaumont, "Beauty and the Beast," *Magasin des enfans*; Grimm, "The Singing, Springing Lark" and "Hans My Hedgehog," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*; Lamb, *Beauty and the Beast, or, a Rough Outside with a Gentle Heart*.

The most significant Sicilian and Italian versions are: Gonzenbach, "Prince Scursini" and "The Pig King," *Sicilianische Märchen*; Gradi, "Isabelluccia," *Saggio di letture varie per i Giovani*; De Gubernatis, "Sor Fiorante Mago," *Novelline di Santo Stefano*; Imbriani, "Maestra," *La novellaja fiorentina* and "El corbattin," *La novellaja milanese*; Gradi, "Il principe Orso," *Vigilia di Pasqua di Ceppo*; Coronedi-Berti, "La fola del re Purzel," *Novelle popolari bolognesi*; Arietti, "El Rin Crin," *Novelle popolari piemontesi*; Widter and Wolf, "Der Prinz mit der Schweinshaut," *Volksmärchen aus Venetien*.

### 57. Child Margarita—La 'nfanti Margarita

#### Tale Type ATU 709—Snow-White

This tale is a variant of the Grimms' Snow-White. Here the mysterious figure of a wounded fairy princess occupies the role of magic helper, instead of the familiar seven dwarfs. Like Snow-White, Margarita willingly does house-cleaning for her host to demonstrate her goodness. The witch's three attempts match those of the witch in the Grimms' tale, as does the death-like sleep, the public display of the heroine in a casket, and her revival by her royal bridegroom-to-be. Far less familiar is the motif of the helper who has bloody

wounds as a symbol of guilt in need of expiation; magic helpers are not usually stigmatized in such a striking manner. In the present version, the final release of the magic helper from her own spell adds a nice parallel to the heroine's release from her death-like sleep.

Pitrè cited many variants and parallels, and what follows is based on his comments. Among several Sicilian variants there are "Specchiu mè billissimu" ("My Most Beautiful Mirror," Palermo), "La 'nfanti Lisabella" ("Fair Lisabella," Bagheria), and "La riggina 'ntra li spini" ("The Queen Amidst the Thorns," Polizzi). Pitrè summarized the last tale as follows.

### *The Queen Amidst the Thorns*

The youngest of a woodcutter's three daughters was hated by her sisters for being the most beautiful. The father took her to the countryside (see "Pilusedda"), and in the night she wandered off. After some time she took refuge in a deserted palace, found a bloody room and bed, and cleaned the place. The Queen Amidst the Thorns arrived, all bloody, and accepted and embraced the girl, but she warned her never to accept gifts from her father if he should appear. But the father found her there and gave her a ribbon for her hair. Once she put it on, she died. The Queen placed her in a casket and exposed her; a king found the casket, removed the ribbon and revived her; and she married the king's son. Since the Queen Amidst the Thorns had now completed her punishment, she was freed from her wounds.

In "Lisabella" the stepmother asks the question,

"Beautiful mirror, mirror of mine,  
Who can be more beautiful than I?"

And the mirror answers,

"There is fair Lisabella,  
Who is more beautiful than you."

In Gonzenbach's *Sicilianische Märchen*, "Maria, the Evil Stepmother," "The Seven Robbers," "Maruzzedda," and "Beautiful Anna" are also versions of this tale. In the present collection, "The Magic Balls" offers a similar dialogue between a vain king and his mirror. A close Tyrolean parallel is offered by Schneller, "Die Drei Schwestern," *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*, with the difference that the jealous sisters are the ones who have a witch-servant abandon their sister Maria; and when they learn she is safe, it is the sisters who put her into a trance-like sleep. Schneller's collection offers still

another variant in his notes and additions. Coronedi-Berti's "La fola dèl mercant," *Novelle popolari bolognesi*, is based on the same plot.

Similarities may be seen in the opening of Imbriani, "Il re che va a caccia," *La novellaja fiorentina*, as well as a large part of "La Bella Oslesina" in the same collection; in De Gubernatis, "La Crudel Matrigna," *Novelline di Santo Stefano*; and in Basile, "Sole, luna, e talia," *Lo cunto de li cunti*. (See also the notes to tale 58, "Sun, Pearl, and Moon," in the present collection.)

## 58. Sun, Pearl, and Moon—Suli, Perna e Anna

### Tale Type ATU 410—Sleeping Beauty

See the note to tale 42, "Date, Oh Beautiful Date." Pitrè included another Sicilian version:

#### *The Son of a King (Lu figghiu d'un Regnanti)*

A royal prince goes hunting with his entourage and finds a beautiful maiden in an uninhabited palace. In a short time he marries her and offers her a wedding dress that resembles the dress his mother, the queen, had used for her wedding. At the court, nobody knows about the prince's wedding. In the meantime, two children, Sun and Moon, are born to the prince. When his mother the queen discovers this, she has the two children fetched. Then she has them put into the oven and gives them to the prince to eat. When the queen sends for the princess, she is dressed in the similar wedding dress and cries out for her husband who arrives and saves her. Then he has his mother, the queen, baked in the oven.

*Collected in Polizzi-Generosa.*

There are two similar versions in Gonzenbach, "Maruzzedda" and "Beautiful Anna," *Sicilianische Märchen*; Imbriani, "Il re che andava a caccia," *La novellaja fiorentina*.

## 59. Biancuciuri's Daughter—La figghia di Biancuciuri

Tale Type ATU 480—The Kind and the Unkind Girls, ATU 403—The Black and the White Bride, and ATU 450—Little Brother and Little Sister

The tale begins with the contrasting behavior of the good-hearted and the selfish stepsisters and the corresponding gifts they receive from the magical

donor figure. This tale type (480) is widely known in Europe and familiar from the Grimms' "Mother Holle" and "The Three Little Gnomes in the Forest," and is also seen in Calvino, "Water in the Basket," *Italian Folktales* (taken from Comparetti, "Il cestello," *Novelline popolari italiane*). The second part of the tale develops according to types 403 and 450, both of which include the false bride motif. The substitution of the ugly girl for the beautiful one is a very common motif in this collection and can be found in several of the Grimms' tales. The teller has made the tale more complex by adding and developing the figure of the younger brother (type 450), whose introduction and name at first seem almost an aside.

Pitrè noted close parallels in a similar tale from Borgetto, as well as tales 60 and 61, "Ciciruni" and "Baldellone," from this collection, and Basile, "Le tre fate," *Lo cunto de li cunti*. He further noted that the motif of the substitution of the ugly girl for the beautiful one is in Gradi, "Isabelluccia," *Saggio di lettere varie*, and that the contrasting fortunes given to the two girls is found in the present collection in "Mamma-draga the Ogress" (63) and "La Za Card-aredda" (cited in notes to 63).

#### 60. Ciciruni—Ciciruni

Tale Type ATU 403—The Black and White Bride and ATU 403A—The Wishes

Pitrè notes that this tale and "Biancuciuri's Daughter" are variants of "Montefiori's Sister" and "Quaddaruni and his Sister" in Gonzenbach, *Sicilianische Märchen*, and have partial parallels in "Baldellone" in the present collection. Earlier variants include Basile, "Le doje Pizzelle," *Lo cunto de li cunti*, Imbriani, "Oraggio e Bianchinetta," *La novellaja fiorentina*, and Schneller, "Das Mädchen mit den goldenen Zöpfen," in *Märchen und Sagen*.

#### 61. Baldellone—Burdilluni

Tale Type ATU 450—Little Brother and Little Sister

This story has sources in Johannes de Alta Silva, "Historia septimi sapientis," *Dolopathos* (thirteenth century); Basile, "Ninnillo e Nennella" and "Tredici piacevoli notti," *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Grimm, "Hansel and Gretel" and "Brother and Sister," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*; Gonzenbach, "Sabedda and her Brother" and "Maria and Her Brother," *Sicilianische Märchen*; Imbriani, "Re del sol," *La novellaja milanese* and "Luccio," *La novellaja fiorentina*; De Gubernatis, "Bella e la brutta," *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*.

## 62. The Two Sisters—Li dui soru

## Tale Type ATU 480—The Kind and the Unkind Girls

For another Italian variant, see De Gubernatis, “Cieca,” *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*.

## 63. Mamma-draga the Ogress—La Mamma-dràa

## Tale Type ATU 480—The Kind and the Unkind Girls

This tale was widespread in both the oral and literary tradition throughout the world since the fifteenth century, largely because of its simple moral statement. The dissemination of the tale and its various versions in folklore have been studied meticulously in Warren E. Roberts’ significant book, *The Tale of the Kind and Unkind Girls*. One of the earliest literary versions can be found in George Peele’s play *The Old Wives’ Tale* (c. 1591–94). Almost all the tales follow the same plot: a good-natured, beautiful stepsister is compelled, like Cinderella, to do all the work around the house, and at one point she loses a spindle or some article necessary for her household chores. In order to retrieve this object, she descends into a well or a hole and finds herself in a strange land. During her journey in this realm she meets three animals, things, or fruit trees and kindly helps them. Because she behaves so well in this realm, she is rewarded by an old woman, witch, fairies, or a powerful spirit. Sometimes she is offered a small or large box, or asked to leave through a dingy or magnificent door. She always chooses the more humble “gift.” The good girl returns home, and when she speaks, jewels and precious stones fall from her lips, or she finds that the box is filled with gold. The stepmother sends her ugly, nasty daughter to this same realm, but because she is unkind, she returns and spits out vipers and toads, or she finds a box filled with snakes. Sometimes the good girl finds a husband, who comes upon her by chance and is attracted by her beauty and, of course, by the jewels that she produces. The bad girl is generally punished by death or madness. In some variants, the good girl does not descend into another world. Rather, she treats an old haggard woman kindly at a well, and her stepsister does just the opposite.

The major literary versions include: Basile, “The Three Fairies,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Marie-Jeanne Lhéritier, “Les enchantements de l’éloquence, ou les effets de la douceur,” *Oeuvres meslées*; Perrault, “The Fairies,” *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*; Mme Le Prince de Beaumont, “Aurore et Aimée,” *Magasin des enfans* (1756); Benedikte Naubert, “Der kurze Mantel,”

*Volksmärchen der Deutschen* (1789); Grimm, "Mother Holle," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. There were numerous folk and fairy tales about friendly and unfriendly fairy tales after the Grimms published their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in Germany, and the most popular and didactic rendition was Ludwig Bechstein's "Die Goldmaria und die Pechmaria," *Deutsches Märchenbuch*.

Pitrè's "Mamma-draga the Ogress" is a close variant of the Grimms' "Mother Holle" and "The Three Little Gnomes in the Forest," and similar to 59, 60, and 61 in our collection. This is a widely diffused tale in Sicily; Mamma-draga (Mamma-dràa in Sicilian) appears in many of these tales, sometimes purely menacing but at other times acting with benevolence toward the heroine or hero (like her counterpart Baba Yaga in Russian folk tales).

Pitrè notes a version from Polizzi called "La Za Cardaredda," where the two girls are sisters. He also cites a number of antecedents and parallels in the European tradition, as follows. "Nina la stella e betta 'l codon," in Gradi's *Vigilia di Pasqua di Ceppo*; "La bella Caterina," "La bella e la brutta," and a partial similarity to "Luccio" in Imbriani, *La novellaja fiorentina*; "Sidellin" in Imbriani's *La novellaja Milanese*; "La bella e la brutta" in De Gubernatis' *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*; "Die Geschichte von der Zwei Schwestern" and "Die Zwei Schwestern" in Schneller, *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*; "La putela dai quattro oci" in Bernoni, *Fiabe popolari veneziane*; and he notes "The King Who Wanted a Beautiful Wife" in Gonzenbach, *Sicilianische Märchen*, as having some similarity. In addition, Pitrè gives the following summary of a tale 127, "La fortuna può inalzarti, e al fondo può buttarti," collected by Michele Somma, *Cento racconti*:

The brothers Luigi and Giovanni have different fortunes. The first, a poor man, wanders the world until he encounters the month of March. He praises March and is rewarded with every kind of riches. His brother, seized by jealousy, decides also to go and find March. When asked his opinion of this month, he curses March, and the month punishes him accordingly so that he returns a total failure. The first brother received the gift of a little box that granted wishes. The second, a stick to which he would say, "Give it to me!" and the stick would thrash him soundly.

Pitrè thinks this tale was collected in Nola, and notes parallels to the tales 29 and 64 in our collection. These contrasting gifts and the month of March closely resemble details in Comparetti's "Il regalo del vento tramontano," *Novelline popolari italiane*, collected in Mugello, Tuscany, and included in Calvino's *Italian Folktales*.

## 64. The Devils and the Shoemaker—Lu scarparu e li diavuli

## Tale Type ATU 326—The Youth Who Wanted to Learn What Fear Is

This tale has close parallels in the Grimms' "The Youth Who Went Out in Search of Fear"—the way the magical figures appear by falling into the room, the motif of the corpse in a coffin, and the treasure obtained by the hero. The Grimms' tale, however, is more elaborate and includes several episodes with no counterpart in our tale. Gonzenbach's "The Fearless Young Man" (*Sicilianische Märchen*) is another close parallel. An early literary version is Straparola's "Flamminio veraldo si parte da ostia, e va cercando la morte," in *Le piacevoli notti*.

Pitrè notes a Florentine parallel in Imbriani's "I due gobbi," *La novellaja fiorentina*, and a Sienese one in "La novella dei due gobbi" in Gradi, *Saggio di letture varie per i Giovani*, where the fates sing a similar song while doing their wash. He also sees a parallel in the contrasting fortune that befalls the two characters in tales 62 and 63 here, and especially in tale 126 in Somma, *Cento racconti*, that he cites in his comments on the present tale.

## 65. The Two Good Friends—Li dui cumpari

This story belongs to the category of cautionary theological tales, like "The Barber's Clock," "Angelica's Ring," and "The Devil Zupiddu," and does not follow any tale type.

## 66. The Blood Sausage—Lu sangunazzu

## Tale Type ATU 326—The Youth Who Wanted to Learn What Fear Is

The first part of this tale follows the tale type, while the second part develops unrelated themes. Close parallels to the first part are "The Enchanted Dog" in this collection, Gonzenbach's "The Courageous Maiden" and "The Story of the Three Sisters" in *Sicilianische Märchen*, and Coronedi-Berti's "I trii mlaranz," in *Novelle popolari bolognesi*. Pitrè adds that the motif of the slave girl reflected in the fountain can also be found in the variant "La bella Rosa" summarized in the notes to "Snow White, Flaming Red."

# 67. The Fairy Who Wouldn't Speak—La fata muta

Tale Type ATU 898—The Daughter of the Sun (The Speechless Maiden, The Doll Bride)

Gonzenbach's "The Daughter of the Sun," *Sicilianische Märchen*, is a close variant, although Pitрэ's tale has a different beginning, without the warning prophecy and confinement of the virgin princess in a tower.

Pitrэ summarized two variants as follows:

*Your Father is the Sun, Your Mother is the Moon*  
(*Tò patri è suli, tò matri è luna*)

An old woman tried to use small change to buy precious objects from some merchants, and they sent her away with a beating. She managed, however, to buy three little dolls and set them on her balcony. A prince fell in love with them and chose one to marry, after having thrown silver to the first, gold to the second, and pearls to the third. But once they were married, the doll refused to see him. So, he punished her by confining her to a chamber and having her food sent there. She lost her thimble while sewing and broke off a finger, but the finger found its way back to her. A servant reported this to the prince, who by now had remarried. The new wife wanted to prove herself equally capable, so she broke off her finger, but it caused her death. The doll's next feat was to put her hands into a pan of boiling oil and create five fish, which she sent to the prince, who had again remarried. His new wife attempted the same feat and died. The prince remarried again. Now the doll heated up an oven, shut herself inside it, and came out with seven tears. They turned into seven hot cakes, which she sent to the prince. The new wife attempted the same feat and died. Now the doll sent word that she would speak to the prince, if he came to her door and said, "Your father is the sun, your mother is the moon." The prince said these words, and the two of them became happily married.

*Collected in Polizzi-Generosa.*

*The Whale's Daughter (La figlia di la balena)*

Two women friends went to the fair, where one bought three dolls, a weeping one, a smiling one, and a melancholy one. The king passed and greeted each one, and a spring in their heads allowed them to nod in reply.

The king decided to marry the weeping one, but on the way back to the

palace his courtiers threw her into the sea, for they had been commanded to do so by the king's mother. Consequently, the king ordered a search for her, dead or live, and when she was found, she had become the whale's daughter and a beautiful woman. Because she would not speak, the king had her shut in a room. Then he took three new wives, one at a time, as each one died trying to perform the feat that the whale's daughter performed to destroy the new brides. She finally spoke, and the king took her back to live with him.

*Collected in Casteltermini.*

#### 68. The Ragamuffin—Lu tignusu

This tale does not follow established tale types, but the theme of the prince who disguises himself with a shabby or mangy appearance is fairly common and is seen in "Filippeddu" in this collection, as well as in Gonzenbach's "Paperarello" and "The Brave Prince," *Sicilianische Märchen*. The climax of this tale, the confrontation with the haughty king, is also similar to the ending of those three tales. Pitre offers the following summary of a variant from Villabate.

#### *The Emperor's Daughter (La figghia di lu 'Mperaturi)*

An emperor had a beautiful daughter who fell in love with a penniless fellow who was really a king in disguise. Since the emperor would never consent to the marriage, the princess fled with her lover. After some time had passed, another emperor held a banquet and among the guests were the princess and her husband, and also her father, although he did not recognize his daughter. When it came time for toasts, the princess turned to her father and made the following one:

As this bottle is the purest crystal to be seen,  
So from being empress I was made a queen.  
With the permission of all you good gentlemen,  
The emperor's daughter is who I am.

#### 69. The Fisherman—Lu piscaturi

This is a complex tale of adventures that does not belong to any tale type, but achieves its length and complexity by combining many standard motifs. The title "The Fisherman" derives from the tale's initial scene, but seems inadequate to represent the wide-ranging action that follows. Pitre notes a similar competition for a maiden's hand—promised to whoever of three

claimants can bring her the best gift after a year's searching—in Schneller's "Die drei Liebhaber," *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*.

## 70. Filippeddu—Filippeddu

### Tale Type ATU 590—The Faithless Mother

Variants of this tale are Gonzenbach's "Paperarello" and "The Brave Prince," *Sicilianische Märchen*. Pitрэ comments that the horse as a magical helper reappears several times in these tales. The prince disguised in shabby dress is a common folk tale motif and is seen in tale 68 "The Ragamuffin" (see notes there).

## 71. The Cyclops—Lu ciclòpu

Despite its name, this tale bears little resemblance to the Cyclops story as told in Homer's *Odyssey*. See tale 51, "The Little Monk" (with notes) for a much closer parallel clearly indebted to the Homeric tradition.

Pitrэ summarizes two variants, as follows. He omits mentioning that the second half of the first tale is a variant of "Filippeddu," tale 70.

### *The Story of Biamonte (Lu cuntu di Biamunti)*

In this version Biamonte is the hereditary prince of a vast kingdom. After he has seen everything and departs with his mother, he brings her the life-restoring water and is killed by her. Later he is brought back to life by the fairy princesses as in "The Cyclops," and in turn kills his mother and the thief.

Then, under the name of Beppe, and using some hairs from the mane of a magical horse, he finds employment with a baker. With his identity unknown, one day he takes part in a joust where the king's daughter is promised to the winner. He wins the contest but is wounded, and the princess gives him a handkerchief to bind his wound. He then marries her despite the fact that other princes seek her hand. She grows weary of her life married to a plebian. There is a hunt, in which Beppe's brothers-in-law fail to catch even a rabbit while Beppe captures wild boars. His brothers-in-law demand the boars so they can boastfully present them to the queen, and he agrees, on the condition that they all touch his horse's behind, which has the magic power to leave them imprinted with words that give away the secret. When they are all back at the palace, they begin glorying in undeserved praise for what they caught in the hunt, but are exposed as liars.

*Collected in Montevago.*

*Pippinu, Son of the King of Bavaria (Pippinu, lu figghiu di lu re di Bavera)*

A king of Bavaria orders his seven sons, under pain of banishment, to kill their wives. All but Beppe, the youngest, do as the king commands. Instead, he flees with his wife whom he deeply loves. He meets twenty-four bandits, defeats them, and goes to live in their palace. One of the bandits is left half alive, and Beppe's wife nurses him back to health and wishes to marry him. One day she pretends to have such pains that only the water of Roccarimera can cure, and Beppe goes off to find it. A fairy princess instructs him as to what he must do and warns him that, when he brings it back to give to his wife, he will be betrayed and the bandit will kill him. But his last wish should be to have his body tied to his horse's tail: the horse will bring him back to her, and she will restore him to life.

All goes according to plan. Once revived, he is to marry the fairy princess, but first he must wage war against her father. He succeeds in this and becomes Emperor. Then he goes back to his home, and when he finds his wife and her lover, he blinds her and kills him.

*Collected in Casteltermini.*

72. The Daughter of the Merchant of Palermo—*La figghia di lu mircanti di Palermu*

While this tale uses motifs familiar in other tales, it does not conform to any established tale type. The opening motif, of a father or husband protecting the chastity of a daughter or wife by sealing her up in the house, appears in "The Parrot with Three Tales to Tell" (tale 2), "Gràttula-Beddàtula" (tale 42), and elsewhere.

73. White Flower—*Ervabianca*

Tale Type ATU 882—The Wager on the Wife's Chastity

This tale-type has a long history, with literary sources in Boccaccio, *Decameron*, Day 2, Tale 9, "Bernabò da Genova," the thirteenth-century French verse romance *Le Comte de Poitiers*, and Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (1609).

Pitrè cites several versions from the oral tradition: De Gubernatis, "Il Guanto d'Oro"; Imbriani, "La novella del sig. Giovanni," *La novellaja fiorentina*; and Gonzenbach, "The Prince's Two Children from Monteleone," *Sicilianische Märchen*. He also notes that the motif of the husband who threatens his wife for her bearing only female children is found in

Coronedi-Berti's "Fola dla malediziòn di set fiu," *Novelle popolari bolognesi* and that in Basile's "Li sette palommielle," *Lo cunto de li cunti*, the motif appears as the desire for female children instead of males. (The same motif of preference for girls and a threatened boy child can be found in the Grimms' "The Twelve Brothers," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*). Pitрэ further cites Gonzenbach's "The Daughter of the Sun," *Sicilianische Märchen*, for the motif-sequence of the prince who comes across a female child in the midst of lettuces while out hunting, names her "Lattughina," and takes her to his palace to be educated. He notes that a similar wager and punishment are found in Bernoni, "I due camerieri," *Fiabe popolari veneziane*; and that the dénouement introduced by the oil flask is similar to that of Imbriani's "L'uccello che parla," *La novellaja fiorentina*, and of other tales in the present collection such as "Rosamarina." For a similar tale of a maiden who undergoes various adventures before being proven innocent, Pitрэ cites Basile, "Penta manu mozza," *Lo cunto de li cunti*.

Pitрэ observes that the motif of the abandoned child nursed by a doe is very ancient and cites an early parallel in the Greek romance *Daphnis and Chloe* (attributed to Longus, third or fourth century A.D.), in which a shepherd finds the infant Daphnis being suckled by a goat. For the motif of the child found by a hermit, he cites an anonymous thirteenth-century Sienese text edited by Francesco Zambrini in *Storia d'una fanciulla tradita da un suo amante*.

#### 74. The King of Spain and the English Lord—Lu Re di Spagna e lu milordu 'nglisi

Tale Type ATU 882—The Wager on the Wife's Chastity

See the note to the preceding tale 73, "White Flower."

#### 75. The Jewel-Studded Boot—La stivala

Tale Type ATU 883A—The Innocent Slandered Maiden and ATU 882—The Wager on the Wife's Chastity

Pitрэ notes the similarity of this tale to "White Flower," with which it shares some similarity to Gonzenbach's "The Prince's Two Children from Monteleone," *Sicilianische Märchen*, and Boccaccio's "Bernabò worships his wife Ginevra but is hoodwinked by Ambrogiuolo into believing her an adulteress," *Decameron*, Day 2, Tale 9. Its conclusion is similar to Basile, "Tre Corone," *Lo cunto de li cunti*. He also cites a version from Cianciana titled "Lu

principi farfanti” (The Scoundrel Prince), which uses a slipper in place of a boot, as is more common in the various parallel tales.

#### 76. The Left Hand Squire—Lu braccieri di manu manca

Tale Type ATU 883A—The Innocent Slandered Maiden and ATU 882—The Wager on the Wife’s Chastity

This tale is distinctive for the clever exchange of verses that forms its culminating moment and resolves the plot. All known versions conclude with a similar exchange of verse that exonerates the wife, using the metaphor of the woman as a vine. Pitrè cites contemporary versions from Palermo and Marsala, as well as earlier attested versions in various dialects from different parts of Italy. He shows that the story originates prior to the thirteenth century and refers to versions in Greek, Hebrew, and Turkish. He also quotes a Latin version (with the verses in sub-alpine Italian dialect) in Jacopo d’Aqui’s *Chronicon Imaginis Mundi* (1577), where the role of the king is given to the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (1194–1250, also King of Sicily from 1198 until his death) and the role of the offended husband is given to his chancellor and secretary, Pietro della Vigna. Pitrè makes no comment on the significance of the name, but we may suspect that Pietro’s name, “della Vigna,” may be responsible for the story becoming attached to him, since the metaphor of the vine seems part of the original tale.

#### 77. The Great Narbuni—Lu gran Narbuni

Tale Type ATU 883A—The Innocent Slandered Maiden and ATU 882—The Wager on the Wife’s Chastity

Pitrè notes that the opening is similar to tale 8, “The Talking Belly.” (The motif of sending painters out to bring back portraits of the fairest maidens in the world is fairly common in these tales.) The remainder of the tale, Pitre notes, is approximately the same as “The Legend of Saint Genevieve” (“La legenda di S. Genoveffa”), published as n. 949 in Pitre’s *Canti popolari siciliani*, where king Ferdinand orders his wife Genevieve to be killed. Some of the motifs, like the heroine dressing like a man, the falsely accused wife, and the encounter with robbers who live in a cave, recur several times in these tales.

## 78. Old Man Truth—Lu zu Viritati

This humorous tale does not conform to any of the types listed in Aarne-Thompson-Uther's "Anecdotes and Jokes." It is essentially a morality tale of honesty triumphing over deceit, but it shows that honesty needs the addition of wit in order to succeed.

## 79. The King of Naples—Lu Re di Napuli

Tale Type ATU 550—Bird, Horse and Princess, ATU 551—Water of Life, and ATU 780—The Singing Bone

Pitrè included several variants of the dead prince's song in his notes, and he cited the following refrain in a version of Villabate:

Viddaneddu chi 'n vrazza mi teni,  
Io fu' ammazzatu 'ntra l'acqui sireni,  
Pi pigghiari tri pinni di cù  
Tradituri mè frati fù.

And youngsters still sing this refrain in Palermo:

Viddaneddu chi 'n vrazza mi teni,  
Tenimi forti, 'un mi fari cadiri;  
Ca pi 'na pinna d'accedu farcù  
Lu tradituri mè frati fù.

There is a variant of this tale in Gonzenbach, *Sicilianische Märchen*, "The Singing Bagpipe." The king and queen are both blind. The youngest son is the most courageous. He descends into an abyss and remains a year, a month and a day before climbing out with three feathers of a peacock. Once he is above ground, he gives a feather to each of his brothers, but they kill him, etc.

In De Gubernatis, "La penna del pavone," *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*, three sons go in search for the feather of a peacock for their father. The two eldest kill the youngest. A stalk of blood sprouts from the ground where he is buried. When a miller passes by and sees the vigorous and luxuriant plant of blood, he breaks it off to make a reed-pipe. But the reed-pipe sings like this:

Mugnaio mio tenetemi forte,  
Sonatemi ben,  
M'hanno morto nel bosco del M,  
Senza un peccato e senza un dolor,  
Per una penna d'uccello pavon.

The landlord, his wife, and his sons play the song, and in their hands the reed-pipe sings:

Fratello mio tenetemi forte,  
Sonatemi ben,  
Tu m'hai morto nel bosco del M.

The plant of blood remains always fresh because the dead brother was buried there.

There is a similar extract in the Piedmont tale collected by Arietti, “Storia dël caval d’ sett mija l’oura,” *Novelle popolari piemontesi*.

In the tale recorded by De Gubernatis, “Le tre mele,” a beautiful woman is thrown into a fountain, killed out of jealousy. She is taken by an eel, which changes into a reed pipe that has a voice which says: “Gently, don’t hurt me.”

Schneller has a version from the Italian part of Tirol: “Die Greifenfeder” (“La penna dell’uccello sgriffone”). The king loses the griffin while hunting, and he sends his sons to fetch it. Little Giacomi succeeds in finding it. His song goes like this:

Pastorello mio, che in mani mi tieni  
Sono stato ammazzato nella verde campagna;  
Oh che ho incontrato questa morte  
Solo per la penna dell’uccello Sgriffone.

## 80. The Cistern—La jisterna

Tale Type ATU 301—The Three Stolen Princesses and ATU 561—Aladdin

Pitrè included the following two versions:

### *The Subterranean World (Lu munni suttanu)*

A king loses his eyes that were stolen from him by a sorcerer. He sends his three sons to recover them. The youngest descends into a subterranean world, finds the sorcerer, fights him, and defeats him. After obtaining his father’s eyes, he kills the sorcerer. Along the way he comes across a maiden and returns with her to his father, who is happy to see them get married.

*Collected in Salaparuta.*

*The Story of the Sorcerer and the Three Brothers*  
*(Lu cuntu di lu magu e di li tri frati)*

The youngest of three sons, who guard their father's garden during the night, uses his sword to cut off the leg of a sorcerer who comes every night to strip off fruit from the trees. The leg rolls off and falls into a large hole in the garden. The prince enters the hole and finds himself in the underground with three princesses who had been cast under a spell by the sorcerer. Each one is in a different chamber. He helps each princess return to the world above. The youngest princess gives him a handkerchief and a golden apple as a sign of her love and trust. The first two sisters marry the prince's elder brothers. The third wants to wait for the youngest prince who has remained underground. He is assisted by an eagle that carries him to the world above. This eagle vomits a leg that the prince had given him as food during the flight when the eagle had demanded some flesh. The prince attaches the leg to his body and goes in search of the beautiful princess and shows her the handkerchief and so on.

*Collected in Salaparuta.*

There are numerous other Sicilian and Italian variants. The basic plot concerns the betrayal of a young man by his brothers, after he has rescued three princesses from an underground prison. The betrayed young man finds a way back to the world—generally through the help of a bird—exposes his brothers, and marries the youngest princess. This plot is, however, altered a great deal in the different versions with motifs from other tale types. See Gonzenbach, "The Four Princesses," "Armainu," "The Courageous Prince and his Many Adventures," "Bensurdatu," "Fata Morgana," and "The Abbot Who Rescued the Princess," *Sicilianische Märchen*; Köhler, "Die drei Brüder und die drei befreiten Königstöchter," *Italianische Volksmärchen*; Widter and Wolf, "Die drei Bäumchen oder die drei befreiten Jungfrauen," *Volksmärchen aus Venetien*; Schneller, "Der Sohn der Eselin," *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*; Imbriani, "Il mondo sottoterra," *La novellaja fiorentina*. Pitrè also published two other variants: "Lu cuntu di li pira d'oru," *Otto fiabe e novelle siciliane* and "Lu malacunnutta," *Fiabe, novelle e racconti popolari siciliani*.

81. The Magic Lantern—La lanterna magica

Tale Type ATU 301—The Three Stolen Princesses and ATU 561—Aladdin

This tale is similar to the previous one, "The Cistern," but Pitrè remarked that it was of poor quality and not equal to the version he found in Palermo.

Nevertheless, he wanted to keep it because he wished to publish as many different Sicilian dialect versions as possible, and he did not want to neglect this one from Messina. It was also important for Pitrè because the second half of the tale is more or less the same as the following tale, “The Emperor Scursuni,” and thus, scholars would be able to draw interesting comparisons. As for the version he found in Palermo, it was very long, and consequently he decided to provide only the following summary.

### *The Lantern*

A sorcerer who wants to break a magic spell seeks some help, and he comes upon Beppino, the son of a bankrupt merchant. He pretends to be Beppino’s uncle and takes him into the countryside. Once there he has him descend into an underground cave where Beppino finds an enchanted lantern. Since he refuses to come back up with the lantern, the sorcerer closes the top of the cave and abandons Beppino underground. However, Beppino discovers that he is in a garden with gold oranges. He takes ten of them and returns to his home. Now that he is very rich, he asks and obtains the hand in marriage of the king’s daughter. One day, when he is out hunting, the sorcerer steals the lantern from his mother, and all at once Beppino’s family and castle disappear so that now Beppino must go in search of his family. Along the way he acquires a purse, an invisible cloak, and magic boots that three people give to him because of his good advice. He also distributes equal parts of a dead ass to an ant, an eagle, and a lion, and in gratitude each one of them gives him something—a piece of the lion’s mane, a feather of an eagle, and the feet of an ant. Beppino arrives at the house of the winds. The north wind carries him with him to the top of the world where Beppino’s family is hermetically sealed. He transforms himself into an eagle and then an ant to enter the sorcerer’s palace, where his wife gives him some of the sorcerer’s things including the magic lantern and he fights with an enchanted lion that asks for bread and milk and doesn’t get any. Beppino asks for a piece of bread and wine and gets them. He kills the lion and cuts it open. Out come two doves, and after he grabs them, he obtains two eggs from them. Then he takes the two eggs and throws them into the face of the sorcerer who is sleeping. This is how he kills him and lifts the magic spell. Beppino returns safe and sound to his palace.

Both “The Cistern” and “The Magic Lantern” have motifs that can be traced to the story of Joseph in the Bible and to the Arabic tale of “Aladdin,” which was well known in the Middle East during the medieval period and was

published in Antoine Galland's French translation of *Thousand and One Nights* (1704–17). The Brothers Grimm printed an important version, "The Blue Light" in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, and the very first fairy tale published by Hans Christian Andersen in 1835 was "The Tinderbox," which combines many of the motifs found in this tale type. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there were many chapbooks that contained the tale of Aladdin, and in 1822 Nicolas Isouard's opera *Aladin ou la lampe merveilleuse* was successfully performed in Paris.

## 82. The Emperor Scursuni—Lu 'Mperaturi Scursuni

### Tale Type ATU 425A—The Animal as Bridegroom

This version emanates from the beast-bridegroom cycle of tales that includes hundreds of variants. The first and most important literary version was Apuleius's story of the second century, "Cupid and Psyche" in *The Golden Ass* that led to the development of "Beauty and the Beast" tales. In Pitre's variant, there is an ironic gender reversal: the princess is not a monster. Rather, she is under a spell and so beautiful that the young man may not look upon her. The basic motif from "Cupid and Psyche" concerns the disobedience of the young man who takes a candle from his mother to view the princess and then must prove that he is worthy of her.

## 83. The Rogue—Lu malacunnutta

### Tale Type ATU 1640—The Brave Tailor

Other important Sicilian and Italian variants are: Schneller, "Hans der Starke" and "Der starke Hans," *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*; Gonzenbach, "The Brave Shoemaker," *Sicilianische Märchen*. There are hundreds of versions of this popular tale, which originated probably in the sixteenth century in Europe and circulated in the Orient before this period. Often the protagonist is a shoemaker, tailor, book binder, beggar, or poor man. Whatever the profession or class status may be, he is characterized as unfortunate, small, and weak, and generally he must pretend to have great strength or magic powers. This is particularly the case in the Grimms' "The Brave Little Tailor" in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.

84. The Beauty of the Seven Mountains of Gold—La bedda di li setti muntagni d'oru

Tale Type ATU 400—The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife

Pitrè included the following variant:

*The Three Mountains Crowned with Gold (Li tri muntagni di l'oru)*

A poor soldier by the name of Giuseppe is dismissed from his regiment because of poor conduct. He wanders through the countryside, poor and starving, until he comes upon a palace where twenty-four maidens are under a magic spell. One of them is the daughter of the king of the three mountains crowned with gold. This princess persuades Giuseppe to prove he can endure various tortures for three nights. If he manages not to talk, he will save the maidens, marry the princess, and become king above twenty-four kings of the crown. Giuseppe keeps quiet for three nights and resists every torture. The next day his beloved princess makes him more handsome. On the last day the lovers depart to get married in a church. Giuseppe goes first, but an old woman who knows everything sticks a hair pin into his head and makes him fall asleep. The beautiful maiden arrives and leaves a beautiful handkerchief for him with the sacristan. The same thing happens the next day. The third day the maiden leaves a black handkerchief and a note saying that she has departed for her father's kingdom, where she is going to wait seven years, seven months, and seven days for Giuseppe. When Giuseppe returns to the inn where he had been staying, he begins to suspect the old innkeeper and threatens her life if she does not reveal how and why everything happened the way it did. She gives him a magic ring and advises him to search for the seven mountains with seven pairs of iron shoes. He wanders and wanders until he wears out the shoes. In desperation he breaks open a rock with a piece of wood, and a hermit emerges. The hermit places an eagle at his service, and the eagle carries him to the mountain of gold. Giuseppe provides the meat of a pig for the eagle, but during the journey, the meat runs out. When the eagle asks for more meat, Giuseppe cuts some of the flesh from his leg and gives it to the eagle. When they arrive at the mountain of gold, the eagle regurgitates the flesh, and Giuseppe puts it back on. There are three days left for him to marry the princess. Using the ring, he obtains clothes and a splendid retinue. For three nights he takes part in the festive ball at the royal palace. The princess does not recognize him, and as he dances with her, he dries his sweat with the three handkerchiefs. The beautiful maiden recognizes him and

marries him. Then the two of them depart to free the other enchanted princesses.

*Collected in Cianciana.*

Other interesting versions are: Gonzenbach, "The Wasteful Giovanninu," *Sicilianische Märchen*; De Gubernatis, "La fanciulla e il Mago" *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*, Imbriani, "Impietrito," *La novellaja fiorentina*, and Schneller, "Der Todenarm," *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*.

## 85. The Merchant—Lu mircanti

Pitrè mentioned that there was a similar story told in Palermo with the title "Lu zu mommu Battagghia," in which Battaglia is the youngest son of a charcoal burner. He has the same adventures more or less as Don Antonio. It is not a true fairy tale, but it has many of the same features. Another of Pitrè's references is Piaggia's *Nuovi studi sulle memorie della città di Milazzo*, in which the son is told to go and look after the pigs at Saint Erasmo.

## 86. The Unfortunate Princess—Sfurtuna

### Tale Type ATU 938A—Misfortunes in Youth

Pitrè included the following two variants:

#### *The Unfortunate Sister (La suoru sfurtunata)*

Once upon a time there were three sisters. One was called Rosa, another Cuncetta, and the third Peppa. These sisters could not stand the sight of one another and continually quarreled. The one they couldn't stand the most was Peppa. One night, while they were asleep, Peppa's Evil Fate came and called to her, "Peppa! Peppa!" And the Fate went to the bed of the eldest sister and put a piece of bread under her pillow. The next morning, when Rosa got up, she saw the bread and said, "Who was it who put the bread near my head? It must have been Peppa because we are always quarreling."

So she went to Peppa with a stick and gave her a beating. The next night Peppa's Evil Fate came again and called to her as she had done the night before, "Peppa! Peppa!" and this time the Fate took a stone and put it under Cuncetta's pillow. The next morning Cuncetta got out of bed and found the stone. She asked how it got there, and nobody knew. So she gave Peppa a beating.

That night the Fate appeared and called Peppa again and placed a pair of scissors next to Peppa's head. The next morning Peppa got out of bed and saw the pair of scissors. She asked her sisters, and they began to argue about the past nights.

"Who was it now?" she said. "Who put the scissors underneath my pillow?"

Her sisters tried to persuade her that it wasn't them, and Peppa told them that each night she heard someone call her name. So, they made peace and lived in harmony with one another.

*Collected in Polizzi-Generosa.*

### *The Shoemaker (Lu scarpàrieddu)*

A father had four daughters, all of them beautiful, but they were all short of Fates. The youngest had been struck by ill fortune. A shoemaker happened to come by their house, and since he knew how unfortunate all four daughters were, he advised the mother to get rid of the one she found with her hands in her hair. When she found that it was the youngest daughter, Rosina, she abandoned her in the woods. Consequently, the other three were able to get married, while Rosina found work with a lace dealer. At night her Evil Fate came, broke all the household utensils, put a rock in Rosina's hands, and left. The dealer thought she was guilty and chased her away.

Then a nun took her into service, and while Rosina worked for seven years, she embroidered a great cape of gold. During the night her Fate came and tore the cape to pieces and placed the scissors in the hands of Rosina, who immediately decided to leave because she knew that she would be beaten the next day. Then she met an old woman who advised her to put some kind of pasta into a bowl, then climb a mountain with it, and call her Fate. Her Fate would see her and eat the pasta and then she could ask her Fate for help. Indeed, this is what happened, and as a reward the fate gave the maiden a skein of silk and advised her to take it to the old nun's house. She was not to give it away unless she received its weight in gold. Since the king was missing a fragment from his garment, the beautiful maiden offered him the silk, and then he married her.

*Collected in Valledunga.*

For another variant, see Gonzenbach, "Katerina's Fate," *Sicilianische Märchen*.

## 87. Don Giovanni Misiranti—Don Giovanni Misiranti

## Tale Type ATU 545B—Puss in Boots

See the note for the following tale “Count Joseph Pear,” which is much closer to the traditional tale type.

## 88. Count Joseph Pear—Don Giuseppi Piru

## Tale Type ATU 545B—Puss in Boots

This tale type is one of the most famous and widespread tales in Europe and North America. And in many countries such as Finland, Russia, and Siberia, it is a fox that plays the major role as animal helper as is the case in most Sicilian tales. In the literary tradition the best known versions are those of Straparola, “Constantino fortunato,” *Le piacevoli notti*; Basile, “Gagliosa,” *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Perrault, “The Master Cat, or Puss in Boots,” *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*. The Brothers Grimm published a version of “Puss in Boots” (“Der gestiefelte Kater”) in the 1812 first edition of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, but they deleted it because it was too similar to Perrault’s tale. For Sicilian and Italian variants, see Gonzenbach, “Count Piro,” *Sicilianische Märchen*; Schneller, “Graf Martin von der Katz,” *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*; Imbriani, “Re messemi-gli-becca-’l-fumo,” *La novellaja fiorentina*.

## 89. The Enchanted Dog—Lu cani ’nfatatu

## Tale Type ATU 545A\*—The Magic Castle

The prince is similar to the prince in the present collection’s “The Blood Sausage,” tale 66. This tale does not seem to make much sense. The narrative is clumsy, and it is apparent that the narrator is not a very good storyteller. By comparing it to other versions of the traditional tale type, the actions of the young girl become clearer. In the tale type, which can be found in Europe and the Middle East, a poor girl gives all her food to an animal or beggar. Afraid that her grandmother will punish her, she runs away, arrives at a castle, and soon becomes queen. The grandmother comes to the castle and demands the food that the girl had given away or lost. But the girl either pushes her or has her pushed from a balcony or ladder. The grandmother dies and turns into a grapevine that continues to question the girl about the food. Her husband demands to know why this is happening, and the girl replies that her toilet

brush is more beautiful than his beard, meaning that her own castle is more beautiful than his, and an animal or supernatural being helps her to prove this.

#### 90. The Prince and the Charcoal Burner—Lu principi e lu carbunaru

##### Tale Type ATU 160—Grateful Animals, Ungrateful Man

There are numerous tales in which grateful animals help a man who rescues them. In this particular tale, there is a combination of the grateful animals and the ungrateful man, who, at first, helps the animals, but refuses to fulfill his promise to the charcoal burner because of their differences in social class.

The general pattern of this tale type often involves a traveler who saves a jeweler in a pit with a tiger, monkey, and a snake. The jeweler and animals promise the traveler a reward or promise to help the traveler later. The animals keep their promise, but the jeweler deceives the traveler and accuses him of stealing jewels before the king. However, the snake helps the traveler by biting the king's son and showing the traveler the proper remedy that reveals his truthful assertion that he had rescued the jeweler and the animals. The jeweler is then punished for his treachery.

#### 91. The Old Miser—Lu vecchiu avaru

##### Tale Type ATU 1407—The Miser and ATU 1407A—Everything!

There are many different variants that involve a woman who attracts a miser because she appears to eat nothing. However, after they are married, he becomes suspicious and spies on her. His wife is helped by her mother, and together they deceive and punish him. In other tales, more similar to Pitre's Sicilian version, the miserly man or woman watches as the wife or maid-servant takes too much to eat, causing him to become sick from anger. On his deathbed, he can only cry out "everything," and thus the wife or maidservant inherits all his possessions.

#### 92. The Prince of Messina—Lu Principi di Missina

##### Tale Type ATU 1407—Everything!

For another version of this tale, see Imbriani, "La sciora e la serva," *La novellaja milanese*. In this tale a miserly mistress does not want to give her

servant anything to eat, causing her to become sick. After a week the servant goes to the house and tells the mistress that she has lived off nothing and doesn't feel the need to eat. Out of avarice, the mistress wants to try this, but after the fifth day she cannot talk about how weak she has become and makes some signs with her fingers that there are only two days left before she will have passed the week's test. The servant calls for the priest, and when the mistress, who is dying makes some signs with her fingers, the servant says that her mistress wants to divide all the money she has accumulated between the priest and herself. This is verified by relatives, and when the miserly mistress dies, the servant and the priest enjoy her wealth.

### 93. The Gluttonous Wife—La ghiuttuna

#### Tale Type ATU 1373—The Weighed Cat

This tale can be compared to “Le sette catenelle” in Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti*.

### 94. The Seven Little Heads—Li setti tistuzzi

Pitrè felt that this tale was somewhat incomplete, and that the ending was precipitous. It bears some resemblance to Tale Type ATU 1373—The Weighed Cat.

### 95. The Symphonic Eagle—L'acula chi sona

#### Tale Type ATU 854—The Golden Ram

This story is found throughout Europe, Turkey, and South America. Its earliest European literary versions are Ser Giovanni Fiorentino's “Arrighetto, figlio dell' imperadore,” *Il pecorone*, Francesco Sansovino's *Cento novelle scelte*, and Lorenzo Lippi and Paolo Minucci's *Malmantile racquistato*. Pitrè cites other Italian versions from subsequent centuries. In most of the tales, the hero, often a prince, conceals himself in the skin of an animal such as a lamb or lion, or transforms himself into a bird (hawk, eagle) to enter the bedroom of a princess to seduce her or to entice her to come with him. This tale type is defined by a key motif called “entrance to woman's room in hollow artificial animal.” Here it is combined with several other common motifs: the princess's underground hiding place, the hero threatened with beheading if he fails in his quest, the task of identifying the princess in a group of

identical-looking maidens, and the third brother succeeding where the first two failed.

Pitrè provides the following variant from Palazzo-Adriano, which he identifies as belonging to the Albanian Greek tradition of Sicily and told by the 40-year-old villager Antonino Capitò.

### *King Fioravante*

King Fioravante had a daughter whom he hid away in his own place, promising to give her in marriage to whoever could find her within three days and threatening death to whoever failed. Eleven noblemen had lost their lives before a twelfth candidate appeared, a goldsmith's son, who had an eagle of love that made all kinds of sound and music. When the music played, all the animals danced and played running games. Fioravante sent this eagle down to the underground chamber where his daughter lived with eleven maidens. When night came, the young man came out of the eagle, and the first thing he did was drink the coffee that had been prepared for the princess. She cried out for another coffee, but he stealthily drank that one as well. When she called for a third, he revealed himself, and since he was very hungry, she had a pigeon brought for him to eat. Then she told him he could find her again by looking in her father's bedroom, where he would find an opening underneath two bricks marked with the letters "B" and "C." Then she added, "My father will say, 'My daughter is hidden among eleven maidens. Do you choose to recognize her at the ball or when she is donning her stockings?' And you must reply, 'At the ball.' Then at the ball I will throw myself into your arms, and you must ask me." Thereupon she gave him a little diamond with her name. Everything was carried out perfectly according to this plan, and the young goldsmith and the princess became king and queen.

Other Sicilian variants include "The Golden Eagle" (tale 96 in this collection) and Gonzenbach, "The Golden Lion," in *Sicilianische Märchen*.

### 96. The Golden Eagle—L'acula d'oru

#### Tale Type ATU 854—The Golden Ram

This tale is a close variant of the preceding tale, "The Symphonic Eagle."

## 97. The Abbot without Worries—L'abbati senza pinseri

Tale Type ATU 922—The Shepherd Substituting for the Clergyman  
Answers the King's Questions

The same tale can be found in Imbriani's *Paralipomeni alla novellaja milanese* with the title "El coeugh." For other variants, see Gradi's *Saggio di letture varie per i Giovani di Temistocle Gradi da Siena* and Sacchetti *Novelle di Franco Sacchetti, cittadino fiorentino*, n. IV. It was a popular tale and can be found in many collections.

## 98. The Pregnant Lieutenant—Lu tinenti prenu

This tale does not conform to any of the standard tale-types, although the motif of the female character disguising herself as a man is fairly common in this collection of Sicilian tales. Pitre notes that the opening is paralleled in Imbriani, "Novella del Signor Giovanni," *La novellaja fiorentina*. He gives the following summary of a tale he knows from Polizzi-Generosa.

*The Colonel*

A royal princess falls in love with a young soldier and runs off with him. The captain catches up with them, but the princess manages to escape and later kills the captain. Dressed in the captain's clothes, she presents herself at a king's court and is promoted to colonel. One day she recognizes a beggar as her former lover and has him assigned to be her orderly. She reveals herself to him, and they remain lovers in secret, until she becomes pregnant. When she gives birth to a fine baby boy, she presents herself to the king, who pardons her and marries her to her lover.

## 99. Ardanti and Fiurina—Ardanti e Fiurina

This tale does not belong to a standard tale type, but is a classic romance, sharing many features with other tales. Familiar motifs include the jealousy of courtiers, the heroine disguised as a man, imprisonment in an underground chamber, the disguised hero returning to claim his beloved, a king's instant affection and adoption of the hero as a surrogate son, and the accommodating sea-captain who makes his ship available just when needed.

100. Giumentu, the Ishmaelite Merchant—Lu mercanti 'Smailitu Giumentu

This tale does not follow the established tale types and has many features of the romantic literary tradition such as the contrast between true parents and foster parents, destiny as dictated by the stars, the disguised Emperor who reveals his identity with the imperial insignia, and the wise old man of the woods who possesses arcane knowledge. The two Biblical echoes are intriguing—both the Herod-like decision to kill all male children and the epithet “Ishmaelite.” The decision of the assigned murderers to spare the innocent baby and abandon it in the woods is a folk-tale commonplace as is the marriage of a commoner to a princess. An idiosyncratic note is struck by the tale’s insistence on reconciling the conflicting claims of natural versus adoptive parents. The adoptive mother’s seemingly unmotivated rejection of her son is an expression of this conflict.

Pitrè notes antecedents in the literary tradition including an anonymous Venetian “*Historia di Florindo e Chiarastella*” (1555), and De Gubernatis, “*Re di Spagna*,” in *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*. He also sees some parallels with the tale “*Water and Salt*” (tale 10 in this collection).

101. The Dove—La palumma

ATU 432—Prince as Bird

Pitrè included the following variants in his collection.

*The Daughter of King Portugal (La figghia di lu re Portugallu)*

The princess is combing herself on her terrace when a green bird comes and robs her of her brush three days in a row, and she becomes sick. An old woman arrives and makes her laugh as she talks about the green bird, with whom the princess has already fallen in love. Now the princess flees her home and goes in search of the bird who is an enchanted prince. In order to lift the magic spell, the princess has to go and sit on a mountain for one year, one month, and one day in rain or shine. As a result, she turns black, and the prince is freed from the magic spell and then spits on her. The poor princess, however, is helped by three fairies who give her three gifts: beauty, a splendidly furnished palace facing the prince’s palace, and a magic wand. The princess begins living in the palace, and the same thing that happens in Agatuzza Messina’s version told in Palermo happens here except for a slight

difference. At the end the princess crosses over a passageway of cotton to visit the prince who is dying because of her. And she spits on him just as he spat on her.

*Collected in Villabate.*

*The Enchanted Bird (L'Aceddu 'ncantatu)*

A princess combs her hair, and three days in a row she is surprised by a bird that steals her plaited lace, her comb, etc. As a result, she becomes sick and doesn't laugh anymore. The king issues a royal proclamation that he will reward whoever can make his daughter laugh. An old woman is walking by and encounters a wagon of reeds, and she touches one and becomes attached to it and can't untangle herself. She is dragged along and reaches a palace where she is beaten. Finally she sees a bird that turns into a handsome young man and keeps kissing the comb, the lace, etc., and he expresses his desire for the princess whom he loves. The old woman goes straight to the princess to tell her everything. The princess assures herself of everything and dedicates herself faithfully to the enchanted prince. In order to lift the magic spell, she must remain on top of a mountain one day, one week, and one year. When she returns with the old woman, the prince, who has been liberated, sees that she has become black and rejects her. Then he returns to his kingdom. Now the maiden goes and builds a palace in front of his. The prince falls in love with her and sends her gifts that she rejects with contempt. Out of love for her the prince has himself carried to her palace where she spits on him just the way he had spat on her when she had hoped to marry him after she had freed him. Then they get married.

*Collected in Casteltermini.*

*The Green Bird (L'Aceddu viridi)*

A green bird comes and robs things from a maiden for many days while she takes off her clothes. One day she closes the windows, and the green bird must remain in the room. She lets the bird free with the promise that he must return everything that he has carried away. The bird is an enchanted prince. (This tale was incomplete.)

*Collected in Polizzi-Generosa.*

For another Sicilian version, see Gonzenbach, "The Green Bird," *Sicilianische Märchen*.

## 102. The Red Fish—Lu pisci russu

This tale resembles ATU 555—The Fisherman and His Wife. However, instead of the fisherman rescuing a magic fish, the magic fish rescues and helps the fisherman.

## 103. The Three Stories of the Three Merchants' Sons—Li tri cunti di li tri figghi di mircanti

For a similar version, see Schneller, "Welchen von den dreien hat nun das Mädchen wohl etwa geheiratet?" *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*. Here the tale concerns a young woman who says she will marry the young man who brings her the best gift. There are three young men, and after they return from their trip, the narrator leaves the story open and asks which of the three do you think the maiden married.

## 104. Beauty with the Gold Star—La bedda di la stidda d'oru

Tale Type ATU 516 and ATU 400—The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife

This tale has an unusual ending. Instead of being grateful, Beauty is somewhat fickle at the end, and Peppi, the protagonist, must use magic to overcome her strange behavior. The narrator obviously wanted to make a comment about the fickleness of women.

## 105. The Finicky Princess—La rigginotta sghinfignusa

Tale Type ATU 900—King Thrushbeard

For other versions see, Basile, "Pride Punished," *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Grimm, "King Thrushbeard," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*; Gradi, "La principessa Salimbecca e il principe Carbonajo," *La vigilia di Pasqua di Ceppo*; Knust, "Der Königssohn als Bäcker," *Italienische Volksmärchen*; Coronedi-Berti, "Brisla in barba," *Novelle popolari bolognesi*; Gonzenbach, "The Humiliated Princess," *Sicilianische Märchen*.

The taming of a proud princess or aristocratic woman, who thinks that she is too good to marry any man, especially one who is beneath her in social rank, became an important didactic motif in the medieval oral and literary tradition. In fact, the shaming of a princess by a gardener, fool, lower-class

man, or prince disguised as a beggar or peasant became a motif in many oral and literary tales beginning in the medieval period. In the thirteenth-century erotic tale written in middle high German verse “Diu halbe bir” or “Die halbe Birne” (“Half a Pear”), there is a mighty king who decides to offer his daughter in marriage to the knight who shows his valor and wins a tournament. When a knight named Arnold wins the tournament, he is invited to a feast, where pears are served, one for two people. He cuts a pear in half without peeling it. After he eats his half, he offers the princess the other half, and she is so insulted that she berates him before all the guests. Arnold is enraged and departs, swearing revenge. He returns later as a court fool and is allowed to enter the princess’s salon to entertain her and her ladies. She becomes so sexually aroused by his antics that she yields to his amorous advances. Then Arnold leaves, discards his disguise, and returns to the court as knight. When the princess sees him again, she begins to mock him as the knight with half a pear. However, he responds with a retort that makes her aware of his amorous conquest of the night before. Consequently, he compels her to become his wife. A similar version can be found in the fourteenth-century Icelandic legend “Clárus” written by Jón Halldórsson. Shakespeare used the motif in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1605), and Luigi Alamanni’s novella, “Bianca, figliuola del conte di Tolosa” (1531), had a direct influence on Basile. The popularity of the literary tales had a strong influence on the oral tradition, and the mutual development of different versions led to Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Swineherd” (1842) and Ludwig Bechstein’s “Vom Zornbraten” in *Deutsches Märchenbuch*. Ernst Philippson’s *Der Märchentypus von König Drosselbart* is an excellent study of the folklore and literary background of this tale type. For the most part, the tales about so-called “shrews” represented a patriarchal viewpoint of how women, particularly courtly women, were to order their lives according to the dictates and demands of their fathers/husbands. In addition, the women fulfill the wish-dreams of men’s imaginations, and the sadism of the tale is often concealed by the humorous manner in which a haughty woman must learn “humility.”

#### 106. The King—Lu re

Tale Type ATU 400—The Man on a Quest for his Lost Wife and ATU 665—The Man Who Flew Like a Bird and Swam Like a Fish

The key motifs of this tale involve the animal helpers and the use of a magical object or stratagem to defeat the usurping bridegroom. This tale was collected from an 8-year-old girl (who also narrated “The Little Monk”), which

accounts for its sometimes clumsy construction and lack of narrative clarity. The obscurities include the role of the figure with the lantern, the physical layout of the vaulted well, why sheep keep disappearing near the well, the way the stolen bride has passed from the two brothers to the old magician, why he has a magnetic stone, and why there are old people along with the captive wives. This is one of the few tales whose title is poorly suited to its contents, perhaps also a sign of the teller's inexperience.

Pitrè observed that the concluding section, with the gifts of the three animals, is close to that of "About Joseph, Who Went Out to Seek his Fortune," in Gonzenbach, *Sicilianische Märchen*. The opening sequence is very similar to the Roman tale, "Il soldato napoletano," in Zanazzo, *Novelle, favole, e leggende romanesche* (Part I of Pitrè's *Tradizioni popolari romane*), included in Calvino, *Italian Folktales*.

#### 107. The Three Impoverished Brothers—Li frati scarsi

##### ATU Tale Type 676—Open Sesame

As Pitrè observes, this is a short variant of the following tale, "Master Joseph." The narrative contains some inconsistencies which we have corrected in our translation. It is under-developed in several respects: the use of two distinct processes for opening access to the treasure seems confusing, and the precise location of the treasure remains obscure, as does the role of the manikin. In the legends, which Pitrè included later in this collection, the motifs of the magic entrance and death inside the cave are common and are also associated with particular mountains, statues, or locales. Close parallels are found in Gonzenbach, "The Twelve Robbers" and "The Two Companions," *Sicilianische Märchen*.

#### 108. Master Joseph—Mastru Juseppi

##### ATU Tale Type 676—Open Sesame

This story can be traced back to the Middle Ages in the Orient. Antoine Galland translated it into French as "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" and included it in *The Thousand and One Nights* (1704–1713). From this point on, this tale became one of the most popular in the written and oral tradition in Europe and North America. Other variants can be found in the works of Gonzenbach, Simrock, Pröhle, the Brothers Grimm, and Otmar, and in English, this tale was made famous through the various nineteenth-century

translations of *The Thousand and One Nights* by Edward Lane and Richard Burton.

Pitrè's version is a much more developed variant of the preceding tale, "The Three Impoverished Brothers." The variants found in Gonzenbach, "The Twelve Robbers" and "The Two Companions," *Sicilianische Märchen*, are similar to the simpler structure of the preceding tale. "Master Joseph" is a more complex narrative which concludes with the sequence familiar to us from "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," in which the leader of the band hides his men in jars inside the hero's house, but the clever heroine discovers them, and they end up dead. Pitrè notes that the motif of marriage to the disguised robber chief occurs elsewhere in these tales, e.g. "The Thirteen Bandits" (tale 23).

#### 109. Death and her Godson—La morti e sò figghiozzu

##### Tale Type ATU 332—Godfather Death

For variants see Widter and Wolf, "Gevatter Tod," *Volksmärchen aus Venetien* and Laura Gonzenbach, "Godfather Death," *Sicilianische Märchen*; Grimm, "Father Death," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.

This religious story has its origins in the Middle Ages, and it almost always ends on a tragic note. It was widespread in Europe, and there are other variants in the collections of Schönwerth and Saal. In both the Gonzenbach and the Pitrè versions, there is an important episode missing: death generally gives a gift to the son that enables him to become a rich and famous doctor as in the tale collected by the Brothers Grimm.

#### 110. The Companion of St. John—Lu cumpari di S. Giovanni

For an interesting variant, see Bernoni, "De una comare e un compare de San Zuane che i conversava in fra de lori," *Leggende popolari veneziane*. This story has been translated as "Of a Godfather and a Godmother of St. John Who Made Love" in Thomas Frederick Crane's *Italian Popular Tales*.

#### 111. The Baker's Apprentice—Lu giuvini di lu furnaru

Tale Type ATU 470—Friends in Life and Death and ATU 471—The Bridge to the Other World

For another Sicilian version, see Gonzenbach, "Spadonia," *Sicilianische Märchen*. This story is connected more to the religious legend than to the

fairy tale. It originated in the *exempla* of the fifteenth century and was told as a parable to explain the strange happenings in the other world that have a connection to the real world, especially the differences between rich and poor and their rewards. Variants can be found in the works of Schleicher, Grundtvig, Arnason, Bladé, Maurer, and Castren.

### 112. The Poor Young Man—Lu puvireddu

#### Tale Type ATU 767—Food for the Crucifix

This popular story has its origins as a religious exemplar in the thirteenth century and reveals a certain anti-conformist spirit because of the boy's simple solidarity with the suffering of Christ, according to Italo Calvino in his collection of *Fiabe italiane* (1956). Gonzebach published another Sicilian version, "The Pious Child" in *Sicilianische Märchen*, and Schneller collected a variant, "Der Herrgott vom Bäuchlein," in *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*. The tale has been widely disseminated in Europe, and the Spanish film, *Marcelino, pan y vino* (1955) was loosely based on this story. The international success of the film led to numerous remakes, including a TV series and a Japanese animated film.

### 113. The Holy Hermit—Lu santu rimitu

#### Tale Type ATU 839A—The Hermit and the Devils

This tale has only a partial connection to the tale type, a story pattern in which devils visit a hermit in order to tempt him. In the traditional tale type (ATU 839A), the hermit is saved by crossing himself. Our tale, with the opposite outcome, is a morality tale warning against the temptations of vanity and luxury, the very vices a good hermit is supposed to have avoided. The prince-demon's omission of the usual greeting invoking God—which would have demanded the hermit's standard response "conjuring" away the Evil One—is what makes the hermit vulnerable to corruption and eventual damnation.

### 114. The Betrayal—Lu tradimentu

#### Tale Type ATU 706—The Maiden without Hands and Tale Type ATU 510B—Peau d'Asne (The Dress of Gold, of Silver, and of Stars)

Despite some connection with the tale type given above, this story is not a religious legend. Rather, it belongs to a cycle of tales about incest and is

related to Gonzenbach's "Betta Pilusa," *Sicilianische Märchen* and Tale Type ATU 510B—Peau d'Asne (The Dress of Gold, of Silver, and of Stars). In the tale type, The Maiden without Hands, the virtuous maiden does not need to disguise herself. Instead, she relies on the help of the Virgin Mary (angel, saint, God). Indeed, she must flee her persecutor (generally her father) assisted by the Virgin Mary and marries a king. Since the father is obsessed, he continues his pursuit and makes it appear that his daughter has murdered her own children. Banished a second time, so to speak, she is eventually aided by the Virgin Mary or some other helper, who restores her innocence and brings about the downfall of the incestuous father. Other variants of this tale type can be found in the works of Straparola, Arnason, and Wolf.

Pitrè notes that this story exists in versions that are not religious, with the miracle replaced by a deed achieved by magical art, e.g. by fairies. He also observes that the motif of hiding the knife is used elsewhere, citing a tale from Casteltermini in which a hidden spoon is believed to have been stolen.

#### 115. St. Joseph—Lu S. Giusippuzzu

Tale Type ATU 956B—The Clever Maiden Alone at Home Kills the Robbers, ATU 311—Rescue by the Sister, and ATU 958E—Deep Sleep Brought on by a Robber

The tale bears a great resemblance to Gonzenbach's more secular tale, "The Merchant's Clever Youngest Daughter," *Sicilianische Märchen*. The story is a mixture of many types and focuses on a young woman, who manages to outsmart a robber and bring about his downfall. There are many different European variants in the works of Zingerle, Schleicher, Nerucci, and Imbriani.

As Pitrè notes, his variant is a secular tale reworked to serve as a religious tale, like the preceding "The Betrayal." In each tale the divine helper takes on the guise of the heroine, but there are otherwise no similarities of detail. The two tales go together because the figures of Mary and Joseph are the most frequently invoked protectors against harm in the religious culture that created the tales. "St. Joseph" uses many themes typically found in secular fairy tales, including: the youngest sibling as hero or heroine, who discovers the robbers' treasure; is captured by the robbers and is eventually rescued (twice); the Cinderella pattern (ATU 510A) of invitation to the royal ball followed by three successful escapes, and eventual discovery; an old woman as the treacherous ally of the villain(s); the written enchantment slipped under the pillow; and an ironically "fitting" punishment for the villainess. There is some

awkwardness of construction, e.g., the re-introduction of the theme of boiling the heroine in a cauldron, and the impossibility of tracing her after the ball when in fact she lives just across the street. The preceding tales “The Impoverished Brothers” and “Master Joseph” treat the same theme of the hero stealing robbers’ treasure, but follow the “Open Sesame” tale type. Pitre notes that the basic structure of this tale resembles tale 22, “The Seven Robbers,” and the encounter of the maiden with the robber resembles tale 23, “The Thirteen Bandits.”

116. The Archangel St. Michael and his Devotee—S. Michaeli  
Arcangilu e un sò divotu

Tale Type ATU 1651—Whittington’s Cat and ATU 1651—A Fortune in Salt

For a Sicilian variant, see Gonzenbach, “Giuseppinu,” *Sicilianische Märchen*. This story is based on the widely popular story of *Richard Whittington and his Cat*, which originated in the twelfth century, and recounted how a cat helped a poor young man become a rich merchant. After its publication as a chapbook as *The Famous and Remarkable History of Sir Richard Whittington* about 1605, it was also spread in folk books, as a play, ballet, and children’s book. In Gonzenbach’s version the cat is replaced by St. Joseph, and in Pitre’s story, by St. Michael. There are other variants with a priest as helper. Many more versions can be found in the works of Sacchetti, the Brothers Grimm, Busk, Asbjørnsen, Nicolas de Troyes, Waldau, and Nerucci.

117. Pope Gregory—Grigòliu Papa

Tale Type ATU 933—Gregory on the Stone

This tale type, found throughout Europe, originated in a medieval legend about Saint Gregory, found in the anonymous *Gesta Romanorum* and French versions as early as the twelfth century. The legend is based on the historical reality that Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) gave new importance to the concept of penance in *this* life instead of in Purgatory. The motif of the child of an illicit union abandoned in a chest at sea and found by a fisherman goes back as far as the Greek hero-myth of Perseus (born of Zeus’s rape of Danae). The best-known story of a renowned child of incestuous parents is that of Oedipus (ATU 931), who in some variants is also put to sea in a chest. Gonzenbach has a variant, “Crivòliu,” *Sicilianische Märchen*, with the more

dramatic ending in which the incestuous parents go to Rome to seek pardon from the Pope and discover that he is their son. The medieval Legend of Judas (ATU 931) shares some similarities with the Legend of Gregory, and they were studied together by Alessandro D'Ancona, *La Leggenda di Vergogna e la Leggenda di Giuda*. For a modern argument that the two legends are related and derive from an ancient Greek popular oral tradition that paralleled the literary tradition, see Lowell Edmunds, *Oedipus: the Ancient Legend and its Later Analogues*, pp. 17–21.

Pitrè cites versions of this story from different parts of Italy and notes that in the variant “Figlio mio dottore!” to the tale “Water and Salt” (tale 10 in our collection), a father comes to the Pope to ask forgiveness for having maltreated his son and discovers that the Pope is actually his son. He also sees a similar opening in the tale “King Dream” (Re Sonnu) in his collection *Nuovo saggio di fiabe e novelle popolari siciliane*.

#### 118. Holy Pope Sylvester—Lu Santu Papa Silvestru

The Roman Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity in 313 was an epoch-making event, which was transformed into legend and eventually entered the popular tradition as a folk tale. The legend dates back to the late fifth century (it is alluded to by Gregory of Tours and Bede). Sylvester was Pope from 314 to 335, but his legendary connection to Constantine has no factual basis, and he was not involved in Constantine's conversion (which was performed by Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia). Pope Sylvester's miraculous transformation of the three rape plants into an amount sufficient to feed the general's army is clearly modeled on Christ's miracle of the loaves and fishes in the New Testament.

#### 119. Pilate—Pilatu

The figure of Pilate is well represented in the folk tradition with little resemblance to the Biblical Pilate. Pitrè offers several proverbs and folk sayings in which Pilate appears. Referring to a house whose inhabitants are ill but not seriously so, it was “playfully” (*scherzando*) said, “In that house with Pilate's name, some are crippled and some are lame” (*A la casa di Pilatu, cu' è ciuncu e cu' è sciancatu*).

The idea of a sinner against Christ who is condemned to eternal penance and suffers unending remorse, reappears in the following tale of “Malchus the Desperate.”

## 120. Malchus the Desperate—Marcu dispiratu

“Desperate Malchus” is derived from the Malchus named in the Gospels as a servant of the high priest, whose ear is severed by Peter. He is named in John 18:10, and referred to without name at Luke 22:51, where the severed ear is healed by Jesus. Pitrè quotes two verse fragments from unpublished Sicilian folk legends that refer to the Biblical incident:

Malchus the Jew sprang to his feet,  
And well-armed with an iron glove  
He slapped Christ so violently  
That he knocked the sacred teeth from his mouth.

And then, filled with evil intent,  
Malchus the Jew attacked our Lord,  
In anger struck him with his glove,  
Knocked him face down on the ground.  
Then Saint Peter, ignoring the risk,  
Cut an ear from that Jewish dog;  
But Christ then, lifting the ear from the ground  
Re-attached it, and healed the wound.

Pitrè then quotes the note he wrote for these verses in his *Canti popolari siciliani* (Vol. II, n. 964, p. 368), where he emphasizes that the “Desperate Malchus” of popular legend is a different figure from the Biblical person, a figure condemned to eternal wandering without rest (compare Pilate’s eternal punishment in the preceeding tale). Pitrè finds the same traditional figure cited in D. G. Bernoni, *Pregchiere popolari veneziane* (1873), p. 18, where Malchus’s blow is dealt to Mary rather than to Jesus.

## 121. St. Peter and the Thieves—S. Petru e li latrì

Pitrè wrote the following in his notes to the tale:

This story belongs to the tradition of thieves who claim to have been blessed by Jesus Christ. In the package that was sent to me by the community of Santa Ninfa, the noble Antonino Destefani-Perz wrote that some thieves had once captured one of his uncles. They tried to persuade him that ultimately they were not those dark and grim characters that the world made them out to be. “We’ve been blessed by God, and you can hear it in the gospels at Mass.” And as proof they used this story about St. Peter. And they said if it weren’t for us, the judges, lawyers, deputies, and

police wouldn't earn a living, and if there were less thieves in the world, everyone would perish from hunger.

Here is the version that Pitрэ collected from Santa Ninfa.

*The Thieves and St. Peter (Li latrì e S. Petru)*

When the Lord went walking about the earth one time, it turned very dark toward the evening, and he and all the apostles became confused and didn't know what to do. They consulted with one another and decided to go to a shepherd guarding a flock of sheep nearby and to ask for food and shelter. They did just that, but when they arrived in front of the haystack and the shepherd saw they were poor and had nothing, he began to meddle with them, and it was a miracle that he didn't set the dogs on them. He refused to give them bread or ricotta. He didn't even let them sleep in his own haystack. Instead, he sent them to another haystack in front of his where the dogs slept.

The Lord and his apostles did as God wished and went to sleep, but St. Peter was all heated up and could not sleep. Grumbling, he watched from an opening in the hay when suddenly he heard a noise, tap, tap, tap . . . and four thieves appeared with swords and began uttering curses. The shepherd was terribly frightened, and their chief cried out, "Come my men, for our Lord our master.—Quick, Peppi! Ninu! Take some cheese, take the ricotta, bread, and wine. Oh what an honor and pleasure!"

St. Peter saw what was happening and grumbled to himself against the Lord and thought, "It's much better to be a thief than an apostle."

At that very moment the chief of the thieves discovered him, and looking at St. Peter, he asked, "Who the devil are you?"

And when he heard that they were poor men who the shepherd had refused to give anything to eat, the chief immediately grabbed a whip and *whack! whack!* He lashed the shepherd.

"Weren't you taught, you Jew, to respect the poor? You thief, murderer, rotten thing!" *Whish, whack, whish, whack.* After he finished beating the shepherd, he immediately picked up the cheese, ricotta, bread, and everything else there was, and he brought it all to the Lord and the apostles,

"Eat, my little ones . . . it's yours. Go ahead and eat. . . . The shepherd of the poor will not leave you!"

St. Peter nodded with this head and was glad about the beating that the shepherd received. When the chief left the haystack, St. Peter turned to the Lord and said, "And people say bad things about the thieves! If they had not come this evening, we would have died from hunger."

"You're right, Peter," the Lord said. "Blessed be the thieves."

## 122. St. Peter and the Tavern-Keeper—S. Petru e lu tavniraru

## 123. The Lord, St. Peter, and the Apostles—Lu Signuri, S. Petru e li apostuli

See the following variants, Gualteruzzi, “Qui conta come Domeneddio s’ accompagnò con un giullare,” *Le cento novelle antiche*; Grimm, “The Old Man Made Young Again,” *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*; Asbjørnsen and Moe, *Popular Tales from the Norse*; De Gubernatis “Gesù e Pipetta,” *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*; Knust, “Ein Erdengang des Erlösers,” *Italienische Märchen*; Simrock, *Deutsche Märchen*; Cosquin, “Le Foie de Mouton,” *Contes populaires de Lorraine*.

## 124. Motive—Accaciùni

## 125. Brother John—Fra Giugannuni

This tale is related to “St. Peter and the Tavern-Keeper” and “The Lord, St. Peter, and the Apostles.” For other variants see, De Gubernatis, “Compar Miseria,” *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*; Widter and Wolf, “Beppo Pipetta” and “Der Höllenpfortner,” *Volksmärchen aus Venetien*; Schneller, “Der Stöpselwirth,” *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*.

This tale is commonly known in Tuscany as “Prete Olivo,” and Domenico Batacchi wrote a literary version “La vita e la morte di Prete Ulivo,” *Novelle galanti*. See also other German versions by the Brothers Grimm, etc.

## 126. St. Peter’s Mama—Lu porru di S. Petru

Here is a version from the same province of Palermo.

*St. Peter’s Mama (La mamma di S. Petru)*

When St. Peter’s mama was in Purgatory, she was granted permission to go to Heaven thanks to the pleading of her son. The poor souls of Purgatory grabbed hold of the seams of her dress to go up to Heaven with her. She began to kick them and shake her dress to make them fall.

“Scat! Get away from here! You all should have had saints like my son!”

When the Lord saw this, he made her fall back down. And St. Peter’s mother became a proverb, and people now say, “If you’re not careful, you’ll end up like St. Peter’s mama.”

Collected in Bagheria.

Pitrè published two other versions of “La Mamma di S. Petru” in *Saggio di fiabe e novelle* and *Studio critico sui canti popolari siciliani*. This tale can be found throughout Italy as well as in Serbia and Greece. For some other interesting variants, see Gradi, *Saggio di letture Varie per i Giovani*; Bernoni, “De la mare de San Petro che la vien fora da l’inferno oto giorni ogni ano,” *Leggende fantastiche popolari veneziane*; Schneller, “Die Mutter des heiligen Petrus,” *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*; Arietti, “’l pör d’ S. Pé” (Il porro di S. Pietro), *Novelle popolari piemontese*.

Reinhold Köhler sent Pitrè a German version of the fifteenth century that was published in *Monc’s Anzeiger für Kunde der deutschen Vorzeit* (1836). It reads as follows:

Saint Peter won’t let a poor woodcutter into Heaven even though he had been very diligent in his life because he did not do anything else good. Finally, after the woodcutter pleads with him, Saint Peter declares that he is ready to pull him up by his ax (Schägel) into Heaven. However as the woodcutter reaches the highest level, the handle falls out of the blade of the ax, and the woodcutter, who was holding on tightly to the handle, falls back down into Hell.

## 127. Master Francesco Sit-Down-and-Eat—Mastru Franciscu Manciacia-e-Sedi

Salvatore Salomone-Marino, who collected this tale for Pitrè wrote him the following note:

This story appears to me to be a simple tale, an exquisite moral fable. Indulgence engenders idleness, and the father is idleness with all its vices. Master Francesco is the live incarnation of indulgence and idleness. He is such a depraved drunkard that he conceives the despicable and sinful plan of sacrificing his daughters for gold to one of those hags or furies who deal in the infamous trade of innocent maidens promising them happiness, etc. etc. However, the daughters represent the virtue and ethos of work, and in time they escape the snare of the wicked old woman. So, the despicable father, already turned on by his own lasciviousness and the lure of money, goes and throws himself desperately into the quagmire of that “Thaïs.” Thus, in order to live he must procure the good food that the ogre-husband swallows, or better, he must procure the unhappy maidens that the ogress sells to her rich clients. But in the end the despicable Master Francesco succumbs to the uncontrollable libidinous desires of the furies, a suitable death for such iniquity.

## 128. Saddaedda—Saddaedda

Pitrè published another interesting version, “La Gamba” in *Novelline popolari toscane*. For other variants, see Schneller, “Cattarinetta,” *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol* and Bernoni, “Nonno Cocon,” *Tradizioni popolari veneziane*.

## 129. The Sliced Rooster—Lu menzu-gadduzzu

This is a strange tale that involves an animal as a helper, but there is not a particular tale type to categorize it.

## 130. Don Firriulieddu—Don Firriulieddu

## Tale Type ATU 312D—Rescue by the Brother

This tale begins with the common motif of the daughter who becomes lost when carrying food to her father working in the fields. However, it quickly changes into a tale of rescue after her brother is born and decides to seek his long-lost sister.

## 131. Pitidda—Pitidda

This tale was generally told to children as a lesson in memory. For other versions, see, Imbriani, “Petruzzo,” *La novellaja fiorentina*; Gradi, “Novella di Petruzzo, *Saggio di letture varie per i Giovani*.

## 132. Godmother Fox—Cummari vurpidda

Similar to “Pitidda,” this comic tale was often told to children.

## 133. The Goat and the Nun—La crapa e la monaca

For a variant, see Imbriani, “La Capra ferrata,” *La novellaja Fiorentina*.

## 134. The Cat and the Mouse—La gatta e lu surci

Pitrè refers to two other Sicilian variants.

*The Sausage (Sasizzedda)*

A sausage takes the place of the mouse. Once the sausage dies, the tale grows with similar incidents as in “The Cat and the Mouse” until there is the

following ending: “The sausage fell into the pot and died. So the iron lets off steam. The cat scratches and pulls out her hair. The king’s daughter puts on mourning clothes. The bird plucks out its feathers. The fountain dries itself out. The servant breaks the jug. The crazy woman sifts the flour. And the monk of St. Nicholas says the mass without his robes.”

*Collected in Palermo and Borgetto.*

### *Donna Anna*

Donna Anna has a turtle that falls into a pot of boiling water and is cooked. Donna Anna laments the death of the turtle. At the end of the tale there is the following refrain: “The turtle is boiled. Donna Anna scratches herself and pulls out her hair. The crow plucks out its feathers. The tools turn over. The ladder falls down. The maiden breaks the pitcher. The crazy woman sifts the flour. The booster picks his teeth with a toothpick. The sexton throws himself from the bell tower. And the farmer digs and lifts his head to see what’s coming.”

*Collected in Polizzi-Generosa.*

The first part of this tale can be found in Maspons y Labrós, “La Ratela,” *Cuentos populares Catalans*. The tale was widespread in Europe and Pitрэ provides several references: a Greek version in Morosi, *Studi sui dialetti greci della terra d’otranto*; Imbriani, “Topo,” *La novellaja fiorentina*; Montel, *Poésie populaire de Languedoc: Contes populaires*.

The tale was told to children as a game to see if they could remember the series of incidents. In the English tradition, there are several similar tales such as “The House That Jack Built.”

### 135. The Sexton’s Nose—Lu nasu di lu sagristanu

Pitrэ remarks that this tale can be divided into two parts. As separate tales, they can be found in Sicily and Italy. In Italy, the first part often has the title “O gallitti, o circiritto,” which means “this or that,” said as a demand. A variant can be found in Morosi, *Studi sui dialetti greci della terra d’otranto*. The second part of “The Sexton’s Nose” is part of a tradition of children’s tales and generally begins when the dog bites the sexton. There are versions in Imbriani’s *La novellaja fiorentina* and Coronedi-Berti’s *Novelle popolari bolognesi*.

### 136. The Old People—Li vecchi

See the following variants: Imbriani, “La novella del sig. Donato,” *La novellaja fiorentina*; Bernoni, “’Na giornada de sagra” and “El sestelo de fiori,”

*Fiabe popolari veneziane*; de Gubernatis, “La principessa che non ride,” *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*; Montel, “La Crabo,” *Poésie populaire de Languedoc: contes populaires*.

### 137. Parrineddu—Parrineddu

For variants see, Imbriani, “El gessumin,” “I tre Tosänn del Re,” *La novellaja milanese* and “La novella del Signor Donato,” *La novellaja fiorentina*. Pitрэ remarks that there were a number of other similiar tales and jokes in Sicily. Many were told during the period of Carnival when jokes were aplenty. He listed two examples of questions that a child might ask. The first was:

“Cci jisti?”  
 “Unni?” risponde un altro.  
 “Unni cacanu i Palummi  
 E ti fannu tummi tummi!”

The second question:

“Nni voi?”  
 “Chi?”  
 “Mmerda di voi.” (bue)

### 138. The Treasure—La truvatura

There were many types of tales similar to this one in which the narrator plays a joke on the listeners with a never-ending story.

### 139. The Riddle—Lu ’nniminu

According to Pitрэ this tale was told to lighten the parties and conversations of children. He added the following version.

*Once Upon a Time There Were Three Brothers*  
 (‘Na vota cc’eranu tri frati . . .)

Once upon a time there were three brothers, one naked and two undressed. They had three rifles, one without a trigger, two, unloaded. They went hunting and caught three rabbits. Two fled and one escaped. They took the one that fled and put it into a sack. Then they walked to a plain where there was a

cottage without a roof and without walls. They knocked and asked who was there. Someone responded from inside and said, "What do you want, gentlemen?"

"We are three brothers, one naked and two undressed. We have three rifles, one without a trigger, two unloaded. We went hunting and caught three rabbits, two fled and one escaped. We took the one that escaped and put it into a sack. Now we've come here because we want to cook the rabbit."

"Gentlemen," the lady responded. "I have three pans, one without a bottom and two that are damaged. If you want, I can cook the rabbit for you in my pot without a bottom."

While she was cooking the rabbit in the pot without a bottom, *whisssh!* one of the brothers suddenly felt a pain in the bones of his feet.

"Oww! I'm dying! I'm dying!"

They called for a doctor, and the doctor said, "Get a horse, take out its bowels, pound it into a dilatory, and you'll have the right medicine."

And this what the brothers did, and soon their brother was cured.

Pinch him here, pinch him there,  
Give it to. . . \* Stick it there!

*Collected in Vicari.*

\* Here the storyteller names one of the listeners.

#### 140. King Ridiculous—Lu Re-befè

There is a variant of this tale in Imbriani's *La novellaja fiorentina*.

#### 141. The Tale about the Barber—Lu cuntu di lu varveri

This tale was told mainly as a joke to children to keep them quiet before a tale. Pitrè published the following Sicilian variant in his book *Canti popolari siciliani*:

Once upon a time there was a simpleton, and he was pulling three coins: one for wine, one for bread, and one for all that you can eat with bread. . . . And once upon a time there was a simpleton.

(*'Na vota cc'era un baggiu, e tirava tri carrini: un carrinu di vinu, un carrinu di pani, e un carrinu di cumpanaggiu. . . . E 'na vota cc'era un baggiu.*)

*Collected in Noto.*

Pitrè also collected the following nonsense rhymes from different regions of Italy intended to make children behave and keep them quiet.

Once upon a time there was a king, a pope, and a dwarf . . . This king, this pope, and this dwarf. . . (And then the storyteller would start telling the tale once again at the beginning.)

(‘Na vota cc’era un re, un papa e un nanu. . . . Stu re, stu papa e stu nanu. . . [E si comincia sempre da capo].)

*Collected in Palermo.*

Once there was, so it was told . . .  
Some fine cheese and more besides.  
(‘Na vota s’arriccunta . . .  
Cascavaddu cu la junta.)

*Collected in Palermo.*

Once upon a time there was an old man  
Who was sweeping out his hut,  
And when he found a little coin,  
He bought a little horse.  
This horse was full of shit—  
In your face because you wanted this tale to be told!  
(‘Na vota cc’era un vicchiareddu,  
Chi scupava lu pagghiareddu  
E asciò un tirdinareddu.  
S’accattò lu cavadduzzu,  
Lu cavadduzzu era cacatu,  
A la facci tua ca lu vulisti cuntatu!)

*Collected in Palermo*

Once upon a time there was a king and a queen  
Well, this king and this queen  
Did it in a tub;  
The tub had no bottom.  
So they did it in a kettle.  
But the kettle was broken.  
So they did it in your mouth.  
(‘Na vota cc’era un re e ‘na reggina.  
Stu re e sta rigga  
Facia ’nta la tina;  
La tina era sfunnata.  
Facia ’nta la pignata;

La pignata era rutta.  
Facia 'nta la tò vucca.)

*Collected in Palermo.*

Once upon a time  
there was an old man and a woman  
on top of a mountain . . .  
Be quiet if you want me to tell the rest of the story.  
(Ce staiva 'na vota  
'Nu viecchio e 'na vecchia,  
Sopra 'nu mont'. . .  
Statte citt', ce mo' te l'accont.)

*Collected in Bovino, Capitanata.*

Once upon a time  
There was an old man and a woman  
On top of a mountain. . .  
Be quiet if you want me to tell the rest of the story.  
('N ce stava 'na vota,  
'Nu viecchio e 'na vecchia  
'Ncopp' a 'nu monte. . .  
Statte zitte, ca mo' te lu conto.)

*Collected in Naples.*

Once there was a man  
on top of the dome  
with a basket on his back . . .  
But be quiet if you want me to tell the tale.  
(Ona volta gh'era on omm  
apôs al domm,  
Cont el gerllett in spalla . . .  
Ma tassii s'hoo de cuntàlla!)

*Collected by Imbriani in Milan, La novellaja milanese.*

Once upon a time there was a man  
Who was on top of the dome  
With a shotgun on his back.  
Do you want me to tell the tale?

(Gh'eva òna volta òn om  
 Ch'el stava appôs al dom  
 Cònt on sciôppet in spala  
 Hò de cuntàla?)

*Collected in Como.*

The story about the hard work  
 That lasts very long . . .  
 If you want me to tell it to you, I'll tell it.  
 (La novella dello stento  
 Che dura molto tempo  
 Se volete che ve la dica ve la dirò.)

*Collected in Tuscany, see Fanfani, Vocabolario dell'uso toscano.*

The Story about Mister Intention  
 That lasts very long,  
 And can never be unraveled.  
 Do you want me to tell the tale?  
 (La storia del Sior Intento  
 Che dura molto tempo  
 Che mai no se destriga:  
 Volè che ve la diga?)

*Collected in the province of Venetia. See Bolza, Canzoni popolari comasche.*

#### 142. The Prince's Last Will and Testament—Lu tistamentu di lu principi

This tale is one of several that feature the figure of the clever shoemaker. The anti-Jesuit bias reveals the peasants' deep suspicion of the trickery and greed they believed motivated certain privileged groups within the Church. Pitre is aware of literary uses of the same story from as early as the sixteenth century and summarizes an oral variant of this tale from Borgetto as follows.

#### *Master Cecco and the Jesuits (Maestro Cecco e i Gesuiti)*

A prince who had no sons is influenced by the Jesuits to leave them all his inheritance. As soon as the Jesuits have his will, they abandon the dying man. Although the prince's wife feels hopeless, master Cecco, the shoemaker, who lives in the palace, comforts her and offers a plan. Before the princess spreads

the news that her husband has died, Cecco dons the prince's clothing and takes his place in bed. The notary is called, and Cecco makes a will dividing the possessions in two, with the larger share for himself and the rest for the princess. When the prince's death is announced, the Jesuits hold a great funeral for him, and on the third day come to the house to evict the princess. But they are ridiculed and humiliated and sent away, and the princess marries master Cecco.

#### 143. Tìppiti Nnàppiti—Tìppiti Nnàppiti

The title comes from the fanciful name made up for the cat, as the teller explains in an aside late in the story. This humorous tale is essentially a joke, a satirical portrait of the pretentious bourgeois as seen by the shrewd peasant. For an early form of the same story, see Straparola, "Pre' Papiro Schizza, presumendosi molto sapere, è d'ignoranza pieno," *Le piacevoli notti*, which has some of the same details and word-play. (Here the comic butt is a priest who doesn't know Latin and makes up pretentious Latinate words to embarrass a peasant's son, who actually knows more Latin and finally avenges himself on the priest by tying a burning rope to the cat's tail, which then sets the linen on fire.) The logic of the story requires that the pretentious master's unnatural vocabulary should create the confusion that causes his undoing, which is the case in Straparola's version. In Straparola the master suffers the loss of his property, not of his life, which is more in keeping with the humorous tenor of the tale. This dénouement is replaced in Pitрэ's tale by a more clumsy version, where the servant kills the master by locking him in his room. Pitрэ mentions a version called "Mastru Scarparu Filosofo" from his *Otto fiabe e novelle*, where the servant is the type of clever shoemaker we have seen in several of these tales (see tale 142 with notes).

#### 144. The Four Numskulls—Li quattru minchiuna

##### Tale Type ATU 1332—Which is the Greatest Fool

The humor in this tale comes from the fact that the three schemes for getting rich are impractical and economically absurd: they require the loss or waste of valuable possessions to achieve imaginary gains that are fools' fantasies. The tale concludes with an "interactive" humor that relies on the performance situation: the narrator baits his audience, draws a response, and then labels his respondent "the fourth numskull."

145. The Three Numskulls of Palermo—*Li tri minchiuna di Palermu*

## Tale Type ATU 1332—Which is the Greatest Fool

This version of the tale type is more elaborate than the preceding tale, containing the motif of the swollen cheeks requiring the intervention of a surgeon, which is a key component of the established tale type. The same story is in Straparola, “Tre forfanti s’accompagnano insieme per andare in Parma,” *Le piacevoli notti*. Pitrè observes that the frame enclosing the three small internal tales is found elsewhere in this collection, in “The Three Good Friends” and “The Three Jokers” (tale 166 and its variant). He also summarizes the following variant from Polizzi-Generosa.

*The Lazy Women of Messina*

Once upon a time there were three women from Messina who were incredibly lazy. The oldest of them was so lazy that when she ate, she didn’t make the effort to swallow. With the food held there so long, her mouth rotted, and since they couldn’t find a cure, she died. The second was lying in bed when it began pouring rain. She refused to move from the place where she was lying, and the continuous downpour finally gouged out her eye, so that she died. The third didn’t make the effort to shut the door during a winter storm, and ended up freezing to death.

*Collected in Polizzi-Generosa.*

146. Three Clever Palermitans—*La scartizza di li tri Palermitani*

This “numskull tale” belongs to no specialized type, but is a sharp satire about the stupidity of city dwellers when confronted with the realities of rural life. The people of the small villages near Palermo, like Borgetto, where this tale was collected, especially enjoyed these stories told at the expense of the Palermitans. The preceding and following tales (145 and 147) belong to the same tradition.

147. The Peddler from Palermo—*Lu pignataru di Palermu*

Like the preceding two tales, this one reflects the “propaganda war” waged by Borgetto against Palermo, in which Palermitans are depicted as fools, *minchiuna* in Sicilian.

## 148. The Rustic from Larcara—Lu viddanu di Larcàra

Tale Types ATU 1294A\*—Child With Head Caught in Jar and  
ATU 1295A\*—Tall Bridegroom Cannot Get into Church

This tale uses variants of types 1294A\* and 1295A\* within a larger story frame to create an unusual kind of numskull tale. Instead of the protagonist being a numskull, he is a clever man who is repelled by the stupidity of people in his own village. But when he visits neighboring communities, he discovers that each is inhabited by even greater fools. Pitrè, who collected this tale in Palermo, comments that he heard the same tale told in Catania, but set in the nearby town of Mascalucia, and in Trapani, but set in Monte S. Giuliano. This type of tale, in which big city people ridicule country people, is widespread, and Pitrè cites examples from other parts of Italy, including Siena, Venice and Bologna. All the versions known to Pitrè feature the identical story of a man who goes to other towns looking for a fiancée less stupid than his own, and they vary only in the specific encounters he has.

## 149. The Man from Larcara—Lu Larcarisi

Tale Type ATU 1262—The Effectiveness of Fire

This is another tale of the kind told in cities to ridicule the limited intelligence of country folk. It is essentially a numskull tale, whose culminating act of foolishness is the comical scene in which the Larcara man sees the Palermo jetty light in the distance and takes genuine comfort in warming his hands from it. This seems a comic inversion of the normal tale type (1262), where the point is the *inability* of distant fire to give any warmth.

## 150. The Man From Partanna—Lu Partannisi

Tale Type ATU 1240—Cutting Off the Branch and ATU 1313A—The Man Takes Seriously the Prediction of Death

The man who saws off the tree below himself is a common figure of fun. This tale introduces the interesting twist that the man who thinks he is dead revives to give his townsmen directions, and they accept these as normal, showing themselves to be even greater fools than he is. Thus the concluding remark about “how clever people from Partanna are” can have two levels of meaning: it is a sarcastic reference to their stupidity but perhaps also an

acknowledgement that the numskull protagonist—also from Partanna—was clever enough to outsmart the others.

#### 151. The Peasant from Capaci—Lu Capaciotu

Pitrè wrote that the theme of this tale had been treated by a French writer and two Italian writers. One of the Italians was Michele Colombo, whose book was *Di una beffa che un romito fece ad un contadino*. Here is a brief summary of the plot: Gianni goes looking for wood in a forest. He leaves his ass tied to a tree outside the forest. Two hermits pass by. One of the hermits unties the ass and harnesses himself and sends his companion to their hermitage with Gianni's ass. When Gianni comes out of the forest, he finds the hermit in place of the ass, takes him home, and invites him to dinner and to stay with him. After some time passes, the hermit leaves, and Gianni goes to the market and discovers his ass. He thinks that the ass is the hermit and buys it. This time he treats the ass in a gentle way that was uncommon for asses. So the ass offends, betrays, and scandalizes Gianni and dies without repenting its acts. This story was translated into English with the title *The Cordelier Metamorphosed* by Michele Colombo and *The Cordolier Cheval of Piron*, trans. M. Hirbert.

#### 152. The Simpleton from Calabria—Lu Calavrisi

For more comic anecdotes about judgment, see Widter and Wolf, "Die Männer von Cogolo," *Volksmärchen aus Venetien*. There are many other similar farces in Bavarian, Swabian, and German. See Kuhn and Schwartz, *Norddeutsche Sagen*; Panzer, *Bayerische Sagen und Bräuche*; and Birlinger, *Volksthümliches aus Schwaben*.

#### 153. The Petralian—Lu Pitralisi

There are many different variants of this tale that involve a cunning rascal, who takes advantage of a gullible victim. See, Giuseppe Piaggia, *Nuovi studj sulle memorie della città di Milazzo e nuovi principi di scienza e pratica utilità derivati da taluni di essa*; Sacchetti, *Novelle*; Straparola, *Le piacevoli notti*; Sozzini, *Novelle di autori senesi*; Casalicchio, *L'utile col dolce*; Cesari, *Novelle*; Coronedi-Berti, "Fola di tri quartirù d'quatrein," *Novelle popolari bolognese*.

154. The Sicilian Thief and the Neapolitan Thief—*Lu latru di Sicilia e lu latru di Napuli*

This tale and the next one deal amusingly with the traditional rivalry between the two southern Italian cultures with regard to which one produces the more cunning thieves. The rivalry can also be noted in some other tales in this collection.

155. The Neapolitan and the Sicilian—*Lu Napulitanu e lu Sicilianu*

According to Pitрэ “this tale seeks to show how the Sicilians are more cunning than the Neapolitans. There is something more or less particularly Neapolitan in the voice of the Neapolitan, and it might have been even stronger. But I collected this tale in Polizzi-Generosa, and not in Palermo, Messina, Syracuse, or Trapani, where the majority of the soldiers stationed in the garrisons are part of the Bourbon army and where the tale might have been told with a stronger Neapolitan voice.” Pitрэ points out that there were other tales spread in Sicily that confirmed the superiority of the Sicilians over the Neapolitans, and one of those concerned a Sicilian who once went with a Neapolitan to a restaurant. When the waiter brought them their minestrone, the Sicilian said to the Neapolitan, “Now tell me a little about how your father died.” “Well!” the other man replied, “it’s a long and painful story.” “Tell it to me anyway,” the Sicilian said, and as the Neapolitan began telling him the story, the Sicilian ate and ate. When he finished his plate of minestrone, he took the plate of his table companion and completely emptied it. The Neapolitan finally realized what was happening, but it was too late, and when the second course arrived, he said to his companion, “Now tell me a little about the death of your poor father,” and he intended with this question to trick him as he had just been deceived. But the Sicilian was much too cunning for him and responded, “Things just went bad for him, and he died.” After this short response, the Sicilian continued to eat.

156. *Firrazzanu*—*Firrazzanu*

According to Pitрэ, *Firrazzanu* is the personification of Sicilian caprice, cunning, pleasantry, and jest, like the cunning, jest, and caprice of other regions and countries. Two other tales can also be attributed to him in this collection, “The Petralian” (153) and “The Neapolitan and the Sicilian” (155), and some anecdotes such as “*La Signura surda chi si pigghia la misura di le scarpi*” (Salparuta), a variant of the first *Firrazzanu* tale, “*Lu pranzi di l’orvi*,” which

can be compared with the tale of the three blind men in Sacchetti's collection, and "Li pirnici e faciani" and "Li corna a lu barcuni." Pitрэ was not able to collect these anecdotes.

In general, almost all of Firrazzanu's caprices can be found in a little book by Arlotto Mainardi, *Scelta di facetie, motti, burle, e buffonerie*. Pitрэ never read this book, but he also recommended Passano, *I novellieri italiani in verso indicati e descritti*.

1 *Firrazzanu's Wife and the Queen—La mugghieri di Firrazzanu e la Riggina*

The same version, "The Story about Firrazzano" can be found in Gonzenbach, *Sicilianische Märchen* and in Bandello, *Novelle*.

2 *The Tailor Who Twisted his Mouth—Lu custureri chi torci lu mussu*

3 *The Smuggled Goods at the Gate of Castro—Lu contrabbannu di Porta di Crastu*

4 *Firrazzanu and the Swineherd—Firrazzanu e lu purcàru*

5 *The Partridges—Li pirnicani*

Similar variants can be found in Somma, tales 115 and 117, *Cento racconti* and Straparola, tale 3, night 11, *Le piacevoli notti*.

6 *The Music of the Asses—La musica di li scecchi*

7 *The Twenty Percent—Lu vinti pir centu*

8 *Firrazzanu's Message—La 'mmasciata di Firrazzanu*

See Straparola, tale 6, night 13, *Le piacevoli notti* for another variant.

9 *When Firrazzanu Was Banished to the Soil of Monreale—Quannu Firrazzanu fu mannatu a la terra di Murriali*

Similar tales can be found in Sacchetti, tale 27, *Novelle di Franco Sacchetti* and in the book, *Le sottilissime astuzie di Bertoldo*.

10 *The Hundred Beatings—Li centu lignati*

For other variants, see Gonzenbach, "Firrazzano," *Sicilianische Märchen*;

Somma, “Chi li altrui inganni tesse, i suoi mali ordisce,” tale 66, *Cento racconti*; and Minacci, third song of *Malmantile riacquistato*.

11 *Firrazzanu and the Household Utensils*—*Firrazzanu e chiddu di la ruttami*

12 *Firrazzanu and the Egg Dealer*—*Firrazzanu e chiddu di l’ova*

13 *How Firrazzanu Spoke into the Ear of an Ass*—*Firrazzanu chi parra a l’arricchia a lu sceccu*

14 *Firrazzanu and the Spices*—*Firrazzanu e li spézii*

15 *Firrazzanu and the Father Confessor*—*Firrazzanu e lu Cunfissuri*

This tale recalls the similar response of a man who was decorating a church in another Sicilian tale.

### *The Wall Decorator (Lu Paraturi)*

One day a man was decorating a church and wanted to pass a lace through the middle of an old crucifix. However, he fell and was battered by the crucifix that fell on top of him. At the end of a few months he began dying. In the last hour of his life a priest came to attend him, and after the priest had given him confession and communion, he took out a small crucifix and urged the sick decorator to commend himself to God. The poor dying man did not want to hear of this, and when the priest insisted on knowing the reason, the decorator told him briefly what had happened, and the damage that the large crucifix had caused him. However, the priest contended that his crucifix was not large; it was only a small one. To this the dying man replied: “Just let this crucifix grow, and you’ll see then whether it doesn’t become more dangerous than the other!”

157. Uncle Capriano—*Lu zu Caprianu*

### Tale Type ATU 1539—Cleverness and Gullibility

The name “Caprianu” was taken from a story with the title *Historia di Capriano*, published in Florence about 1550, and it contains the different episodes more or less that are in the Sicilian tales. Pitrè wrote that there were probably other editions that predated the 1550 book. It is more than likely that Straparola used it as his model for “Pre’ Scarpacifico,” *Le piacevoli notti*.

The following three Sicilian variants were collected by Pitrè.

*Master Francesco Ciudda (Mastru Franciscu Ciudda)*

There was once a husband and wife, and the husband was called Master Francesco Ciudda. Well, he had an ass and earned his living with this ass. One day, after having sold some stuff, he returned to his home with his ass and his earnings in silver coins. Along the way, some thieves came after him, and so that they wouldn't get his money, he stuck the coins up the rear end of the ass. But when the thieves were upon him, the ass relieved itself of the money. Upon seeing the money spill out, the thieves wanted to buy the ass that shat money, and they paid Master Ciudda 300 gold coins and took it with them. First the chief of the thieves wanted to try out the ass in his home, and he spread a beautiful sheet to receive the excrement of the ass. But the ass only spewed forth dung. The chief of the thieves swore that he would take revenge on the cunning Master Francesco Ciudda, but first he wanted to see what the ass would deliver to his companions who also received nothing but dung. Shortly afterward, all the thieves went to kill Master Ciudda. But when they found him, they found him with a rabbit, and he made them believe that this rabbit could carry messages and other things to and from his house.

From here on, Pitrè wrote, the tale does not differ much from "Uncle Capriano."

*Collected in Polizzi-Generosa.*

*The Master Shoemaker and the Three Thieves (Lu mastru scarpari e li tri latri)*

In this tale there are three brothers who are thieves, and a cunning shoemaker sells them an ass, a rabbit, and a knife, which can kill and revive people. In the end, the thieves tie the shoemaker in a sack and carry him to the seashore to throw him into the sea. When they stop at an inn to get something to eat, a shepherd happens to come by and hears that the cunning shoemaker doesn't want to marry the king's daughter because he is already married. So the shepherd decides to substitute himself so that he can marry the king's daughter.

*Collected in Casteltermini.*

*Uncle Birrittinu (Lu zu Birrittinu)*

There are seven thieves in this tale, and Uncle Birrittinu sells them the ass that shits coins, a pot that cooks without fire, and a whistle that can revive the dead. Birrittinu is replaced in the sack by a goatherd, and the thieves throw

him from a mountain. Then Birrittinu throws the thieves from a mountain even higher and takes not only their things, but also cows, horses, and mules. *Collected in Valle d'Olmo.*

Other versions can be found in De Gubernatis, "I due furbi e lo scemeo," *Le novelline di santo Stefano*; Widter and Wolf, "Die beiden Gevattern," *Volksmärchen aus Venetien*; Gonzenbach, "Sciauranciovi," *Sicilianische Märchen*; and Imbriani, "Esempi de Bertold," *La novellaja milanese*. The tale type can be found in other European countries.

#### 158. The Man Who Mended Old Shoes—Lu solichianeddu

##### Tale Type ATU 1736A—Sword Turns to Wood

This tale develops a complex version of a simple tale type. It combines two classic themes, the king in disguise visiting a commoner and cleverness rewarded, and connects them most amusingly by having the disguised king repeatedly insulted but then diverted from his planned revenge by the hero's cleverness. Many tales involve a king or emperor who travels about in disguise to discover what his subjects think.

#### 159. Hook and Crook—'Mbroglia e Sbroglia

##### Tale Type ATU 950—Rhampsinitus

This widely distributed tale type is named after King Rhampsinitus in the version told by the fifth-century B.C. historian Herodotus (2. 217), its earliest recorded appearance. Since Herodotus attributes the tale to Egyptian sources, its Eastern origins must be even earlier. A Chinese version translated from Sanskrit is attested from the third century A.D. For a full discussion of the type and its appearances in Greek and Oriental sources, see Hansen, *Ariadne's Thread*, pp. 357–71. Italian versions include Ser Giovanni Fiorentino, *Il pecorone*, 9.1 (late fourteenth century) and Coronedi-Berti, "La fola della bella filadoro," *Favole bolognesi*. Almost all the motifs of our Sicilian tale belong to the international type: a pair of thieves who know the secret entrance to the treasury, the test of smoke, the trap and decapitation, public display of the corpse and the weeping test, the wounding as a cover-up for the weeping, the use of food to discover which household harbors the thief, the marking of the thief's house which is neutralized by marking the neighboring houses, and the king's final reconciliation with the thief. In most versions the thieves

are known to the king, which is the reason for the decapitation—a motive missing in our version. This tale illustrates perfectly the belief that cleverness—even if combined with dishonesty and violence—is admirable and deserves to be rewarded.

#### 160. The Mason and his Son—*Lu muraturi e sò figghiu*

##### Tale Type ATU 950—Rhampsinitus

This tale is a close variant of the preceding tale, “Hook and Crook.” See the endnote to tale 159 for details about the long history of this tale in the European tradition.

Pitrè included the following variant.

##### *The Son of the Master Axe-Master (Lu figghiu di lu mastro d’ascia)*

The son of a carpenter who is very cunning succeeds in tricking and avoiding the police who are searching for him because he has robbed the royal treasure. The police can never discover the identity of the thief, nor can the king. In order to capture him, the king asks for the advice of his councilors, who suggest that he offer his daughter to whoever unveils himself as the thief who is so cunning that neither the king nor his councilors can detect him.

*Collected in Cianciana.*

There are other versions in Ser Giovanni Fiorentino, *Il pecorone* and in Coronedi-Berti, “La fola della bella Filadora,” *Novelle popolari bolognesi*.

#### 161. The Shoemaker—*Lu scarpareddu*

This tale, which conforms to no familiar tale type, celebrates the success of a wily manipulator of conventional religious piety. The wicked religious parody would have been highly entertaining to the audience of Sicilian Catholics of the period. Like the preceding tale 159, admiration for clever dishonesty outweighs any moral scruples one might feel, and it is noteworthy that the priest actually rewards the hero for his cleverness, despite the sacrilege he has committed.

162. The Shoemaker and the Monks—*Lu scarparu e li monaci*

## Tale Type ATU 1538—The Revenge of the Cheated Man

This story of a poor shoemaker's rise to enormous wealth and power is an incredible fantasy with obvious appeal in rural Sicily of the nineteenth century. The tale has two parts, the first being the story of the shoemaker's revenge on the corrupt priest using the fake ascent to heaven, and the second being the elaboration of his revenge into a series of tricks on the priest and his monastic community. These tricks indulge in violence to a degree that seems excessive to modern tastes and indicates how much hostility a wealthy and corrupt church had aroused among the common folk. As we have seen in preceding tales, the audience is meant to savor the cleverness of the wily hero and feel no remorse for the sufferings of his enemies. Pitrè notes that this tale puts together several individual stories that were common throughout Sicily, and he gives the following summaries of two versions that use only the first part.

*Brother John (Fra Giovanni)*

This is the tale of a rich and avaricious monk who is very devout. A clever thief persuades him to tie a pack with all his valuables to a rope that he lowers from the vault of the church, so that he may take them to heaven. The thief and his companions sing him a song from above:

Glory be to Brother John,  
Jesus wants him in heaven.  
Send up your bundle first,  
And then rise up yourself.

When Brother John sends up the bundle of riches, the “angel choir” disappears, and he is left in the lurch.

*Old Man Lick-the-Fig (Lu Zu Licca-lu-Ficu)*

This is the tale of a dreadful miser who would let his own children die rather than allow them to have a fig from his tree. One day four rogues hide among his trees and sing him the following song, accompanying themselves with musical instruments: “Oh dear Joseph, go tell the Archpriest that the angels have descended to earth.” Being a devout believer, he runs to tell the Archpriest this happy news, and the “angels” steal everything he has.

Pitrè notes that the story of the shoemaker's revenge using the guise of a fake doctor was also widely known, under titles like "The Shoemaker," "The Shoemaker Disguised as a Woman," "The Doctor-Shoemaker," and "The Shoemaker and the Prior." Gonzenbach's "Clever Peppe," in *Sicilianische Märchen*, belongs to the same general type, but differs in its specific details, except for using the name "Peppe" for its hero. The basic story type is ancient, and Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales*, (Vol. 2, p. 274) cites an Akkadian version from 711 B.C. called "The Poor Man of Nippur."

### 163. The Headstrong Son—Lu figghiu tistardu

This tale, like the previous one, includes the theft of a pig and the wily protagonist's successful dealings with a series of challenges. It seems not to belong to any formal tale type, but is a typical tale of a picaresque hero whose adventures and improvisations are highly entertaining. The conclusion, where the youth returns to his father, seems an overt move to support the "family values" of the culture in which the tale circulated.

### 164. The Three Hunchbacks—Li tri ghimmuruti

This tale appeared in Salvatore Bongi's "Gobbi," *Lettere* and Straparola's "Bertoldo de Valsabia ha tre figliuoli, tutti tre gobbi e d'una stessa sembianza," *Le piacevoli notti*. In addition, Imbriani published two variants: "Voglio-ffà, aggio-ffatto e vene-mm'annetta" and "Il convento delle monache delle fotticchiate," *La novellaja milanese*.

### 165. Brother Ghiniparo—Frà Ghinìparu

There is a reference to Fra Genipero in Casalicchio's *L'Utile col dolce*.

### 166. Three Good Friends—Li tri cumpari

#### Tale Type ATU 1406—The Three Clever Wives Wager

This tale has the familiar structure of an outer frame containing three internal tales, as seen, for example in tales 2 and 145. As in 145, the three internal comic tales compete for which is best. This is an old tale type, found as early as the medieval fabliaux "Des trois dames qui trouverent l'anel." Pitrè cites several variants, including a substantial portion of "Tre furfanti

s'accompagnono per andare insieme a Parma," Straparola, *Le notti piacevoli*, and a publication dating from 1558, "Historia nova di tre donne che ogni una fece una beffa al suo marito per guadagnar uno anello," which he says was reprinted many times in the seventeenth century. He adds that this basic story type is common in Sicily, with the three tales varying according to where they are told; and that many Italian storywriters have used one or another of the three individual tales. The third tale about the husband turned into a monk is presented as a traditional Bolognese tale in the *Novelle* of Francesco Zambrini. Pitrè gives the following summary of a tale current in his time in Palermo.

*The Three Jokes (Li tri burli)*

Three princesses together found a precious ring and disputed its possession. They took their argument to a judge, who said the ring should go to whichever of them fooled their husband with the greatest hoax. The first princess had her husband's molars extracted, having convinced him that diseased teeth were giving him bad breath. The second used her husband's absence at the theater to have a wall built in their street, so that upon his return he was driven crazy trying to locate his own house, and trying to calm her down as she pretended to be frightened at the unforeseen development. The third had her husband drugged and taken to a monastery, where he woke up to find himself dressed as a monk and obliged to sing in a chorus and serve mass, all this time in a state of befuddlement. Finally, when he saw his children in the church, he came to his senses, threw away the censer he was holding, and ran to embrace them and his wife. It was to this princess, who was able to change her husband into a monk, that the judge awarded the prize.

167. The Fortune-Teller—Lu zannu

This tale bears similarities to a series of tale types ATU 780–799—The Truth Comes to Light, to the Grimms' "The White Snake," and to Tale Type ATU 285A—The Man and the Wounded Snake. In many of these tale types, a snake, animal, or article helps the poor man by providing some magic power to reveal the truth. In Pitrè's tale there is a more comic aspect. After the discovery of the snake, which does not endow the peasant with special magic powers, the peasant's fortunes improve thanks to chance and his own cunning. As the fortune-teller grows more confident with each solution he finds it is his own ingenuity, rather than pure luck, that becomes the key to his continuing success. The one small awkwardness in this otherwise

well-constructed tale is the way the black adder, carried in a box on the man's back and considered his lucky charm, is never mentioned again.

#### 168. The Prince—Lu principi

This tale is essentially a joke, which turns on the careful use of language to avoid punishment. The third coachman, who understands the strategic use of words, is the kind of wily hero who figures in many of these tales.

#### 169. Never Trust a Woman!—Va criditi a fimmini!

This is one of many tales depicting the ongoing struggle between husbands and wives. It does not fit familiar tale types, but the motif of going down into the well occurs often, for example in the Giufà tales, as Pitрэ observed.

#### 170. Two Close Friends—Li dui cumpari

Pitrэ notes variants of this tale in earlier Italian tradition, citing “La mugier d'un pescaor,” Bernoni, *Fiabe popolari veneziane*, and Straparola, *Le piacevoli notti*, “Dimetrio bazzariotto . . . scopra Polissena sua moglie con un prete,” which differs only in the way the husband discovers the lover.

A Sicilian variant of this tale was published by Pitрэ as “Li Tri Brinnisi” (“The Three Toasts”), *Otto fiabe e novelle*, which concludes with the following three toasts:

The unfaithful wife:

My husband's gone to Lentini,  
And may he never return;  
He went after the water of the sermon fish,  
And meanwhile, we're living it up right here!

The apprentice of the cuckolded husband:

And you who are there inside,  
You can hear the whole story,  
So give me the money and the mule,  
And I can live it up myself!

The priest:

My friends, I know nothing of this,  
I was simply invited here  
To partake of chicken and pigeon.

Instead, my vestments are badly mussed,  
And that's my share of "living it up."

### 171. Settilanzati—Settilanzati

This is basically the tale of a trickster with uncanny knowledge and an unlimited ability to fool people. He is reminiscent of other Sicilian and Italian tricksters such as Firrazzanu (see tale 156) and Gonnella. Here Settilanzati is the avenger of his father's honor, and in the scene of the comic pursuit he has brilliantly made the adulterous triangle visible to the public. His name, Settilanzati, contains the "lucky seven" as its first element, "setti," but it is not clear how to interpret "lanzati" and whether it is meant to suggest "thrusts" or "lances." If we are willing to see the number of tricks Settilanzati plays on people as amounting to seven "thrusts," it would explain both parts of his name, but such play with numbers is not usual in these tales.

### 172. Master Bacù—Mastru Bacù

Pitrè reported a shorter version of the same tale from Polizzi with the title "Master Bacuccu." He noted that the same basic plot—a man disguised as a woman being admitted to a woman's bedroom—appeared in earlier tradition in Sacchetti, *Novelle di Franco Sacchetti* (n. 28) and in Firenzuola, *Novelle di A. Firenzuola*.

### 173. The Monk and the Brother—Lu monacu e lu frattu

Tale Type ATU 1738B\*—The Clergyman's Dream and ATU 1626—  
Dream Bread

This tale successfully combines types 1738B\* and 1626 to construct an amusing story of competition between the monk and the brother. It is one of many tales featuring an admirable trickiness that allows a character in an inferior position to get the better of his superior. Pitrè knew a very similar tale called "The Preacher" ("Lu Pridicatori") told in Polizzi-Generosa, as well as two tales in written versions with similar plots.

### 174. The Priest and his Shepherd Friends—Lu parrinu e li cumpara picurara

This is one of many tales that satirize the greediness of the clergy. It employs the familiar motif of three brothers put to a test, in which the two oldest fail

and the youngest succeeds through his superior boldness and wit. In most folk tales with this pattern, the malevolent figure testing the hero and his brothers is an ogre, but here the same pattern is used with a priest as the villain.

#### 175. The Bourgeois Gentleman and the Preacher—Lu burgisi e lu pridicatori

##### Tale Type ATU 1741—The Priest's Guests and the Eaten Chickens

Pitrè knew versions from Polizzi-Generosa and Alimena that had the title "The Preacher" (Lu pridicatori), and one from Casteltermini called "The Preacher as Guest" (Lu pridicatori 'mmitatu) in which the precious organs were not the eyes but the genitals.

This tale is very similar to the Grimms' "Clever Grethel," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, in which a cook named Grethel prepares two chickens for her master, who has invited a guest to dinner. As the chickens are turning brown on the spit, Grethel begins to drink, and as she gets drunk, she starts tasting the chickens until they are all gone. When the guest arrives, she warns him that her master is sharpening his knife to cut off the guest's ears. So the guest runs off, and Grethel runs and tells her master that the guest has stolen the chickens. The master, who has been sharpening the knife to slice the chickens, runs after his guest, knife in hand, yelling, "Just one, just one!" This makes the guest run even faster, for he thinks that the master wants at least one of his ears.

As tale type, "Clever Grethel" and "The Bourgeois Gentleman and the Preacher" belong to a larger group of tales found in Europe, often referred to as tales of resourceful women.

#### 176. The Tailor—Lu custureri

This is one of several tales about a wife's infidelity and her ability to outsmart her husband. It also contains the motif, common in Sicilian tales, of a husband locking up his wife in the house to protect her from other men (a motif that is used, interestingly, in Roberto Rossellini's 1950 film *Stromboli*). Pitrè gave the following summary of a tale from Trapani that shares some of the same motifs.

*I Leave with Your Grace (La Vostra Bedda Grazia)*

A man from Trapani was in love with the wife of a man from Monte, and her name was Grace (Grazia). One evening, she had arranged a hasty departure with her lover, and she deceived her husband by setting a dummy in her usual place on the balcony of their house, wrapping it in her familiar shawl. The man from Trapani, who was a friend of the husband, had spent the evening in conversation with him, and, when he took his leave, he saluted him from the street with the words, "I'm on my way now, and I'm taking leave with your Grace." The husband replied, "And may God be with you." Only later did he realize that the figure on his balcony—who he had allowed to sit undisturbed so that she could enjoy the cool evening air—was nothing but the house's kneading-trough set up to look like his wife.

In addition to this oral tale, Pitрэ knew several novellas published in different parts of Italy from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century that had a similar plot.

177. The Two Swindlers—Li dui capi-mariola

This story of a swindle based on a pawned object is found in many places. Pitрэ knew of parallels in the nineteenth-century Italian short story tradition, and had recently seen a newspaper story reporting an anecdote from Milan with the same plot, but using a violin instead of a painting. The same basic plot has often been used in modern cinema and television dramas.

178. The Poor Shoemaker—Lu scarparieddu

Tale Type ATU 1351—The Silence Wager

This comic tale, satirizing the extremes to which the stubbornness of a husband and wife can lead them, is widely diffused throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. It is also found as a folksong in the Anglo-American tradition ("Get Up and Bar the Door").

179. The Two Blind Men—Li dui orvi

Tale Type ATU 1577—Blind Men Duped into Fighting and 1526A—Supper Won by a Trick

This variant of the tale type 1577 continues with the two blind men getting a

free meal through trickery—although unintentional—so that something of type 1526A also seems to be present.

180. The Doctor's Apprentice—L'apprinnista di lu medicu

Pitrè cites two other versions: Straparola, "Due medici, de' quali uno era di gran fama," *Le piacevoli notti* and Casalicchio, *L'Utile col dolce*.

181. The Bet—La scummissa

A variant of this anecdote can be found in the first tale of the seventh night in Straparola's *Le piacevoli notti*. The very same story was published in Antonio Guadagnoli's *Gosto e Mea, ovvero, La lingua d'una donna alla prova*.

182. The Hypocritical Peasant—Lu viddanu santòcchiu

This tale is one of several in Pitrè's collection in which a naïve peasant either exposes the failings of the church or stubbornly refuses to follow its teachings. It is more like a joke or anecdote than a religious tale.

183. The Master Shoemaker and the Ghosts—Lu mastro scarparu e li spirdi

Tale Type ATU 326A—Soul Released from Torment

Though the shoemaker does not release anyone from torment, the plot of the tale resembles the story of a young man who enters a haunted palace or castle and is rewarded for his courage.

184. The Desperate Shoemaker—Lu scarparu dispiratu

Tale Type ATU 326A—Soul Released from Torment

This tale is similar to the previous one, except for the tragic twist at the end.

185. The Teacher and the Ghosts—Lu mastro e li spirdi

Tale Type ATU 326—The Youth Who Wanted to Learn What Fear Is

This tale is a clear variation on the tale type that can be found in Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* and many other European folk-tale collections.

## 186. "For the Long May"—Maju longu

## Tale Type ATU 1541—For the Long Winter

This is one of very many tales about foolish wives. The tale type centers on a husband storing up provisions (or food, money, or clothing) and telling his wife it is "for the long winter" (or spring, or emergencies, etc.) and a trickster making off with the provisions by using this phrase as his name. The motif of the foolish woman being shown the trickster's genitals instead of his face would seem to be preparation for a comic revelation when the wife tells her husband about the visitor, but there is no such follow-through in this teller's version of the tale.

Pitrè noted a parallel in the tale "La Patalocca" in Coronedi-Berti's *Novelle popolari bolognesi*, where the husband tells his wife he is saving a piece of meat for January and another for February, and the foolish woman gives them to strangers who claim to have these names. Hans-Jörg Uther notes in his tale-type index that this story is documented as early as ca.1400 in a novella by Giovanni Sercambi.

## 187. The Stupid Wife—La mugghieri babba

This is another of the familiar tales about a foolish wife, who may be seen as a female counterpart of the utterly foolish husband Sdirrameddu in tale 189. These stories usually end with the incurable fool getting a sound beating, which might seem unnecessarily violent to modern readers. However, such harsh punishment was not uncommon in Sicilian peasant society of Pitrè's times, and husbands could be brutal in their treatment of their wives.

## 188. The Fig-and-Raisin Fool—Lu loccu di li pàssuli e ficu

## Tale Type ATU 675—The Lazy Boy

This tale has a significant literary tradition. The most important early versions are:

Straparola, "Pietro the Fool," *Le piacevoli notti*; Basile, "Peruonto," *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Mme d'Aulnoy, "Le Dauphin," *Suite des contes nouveaux ou des fées à la mode*. The version by the Brothers Grimm, "Simple Hans," was first published as no. 62 in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* in 1812, but omitted in later editions, either due to its French origins or similarity to a poem by Christoph Martin Wieland.

The mysterious pregnancy of a daughter was a real concern for many noble families and commoners as well. A woman's body was regarded as a possession of the male, and any violation of a female body was a violation of patriarchal authority. At stake was the legacy and honor of a family. In the cycle of tales that involve a fool, often called Peter or Hans, who seeks his luck by wishing that a princess becomes pregnant, there are other motifs that recall King Lear's harsh treatment of his innocent daughter as well as the cycle of tales that deal with a proud princess or noblewoman who needs to learn humility. Christoph Martin Wieland, one of the most gifted German writers of the eighteenth century, wrote "Pervonte" (1778/79), a remarkable verse rendition of Basile's "Peruonto," which concerns a poor simpleton, whose heart is so good that he is blessed by the fairies and thus rises in society. Another interesting German tale written during the romantic period was Heinrich von Kleist's "Die Marquise von O" (1810–11). Though not a fairy tale, it raises all the same pertinent questions about a mysterious pregnancy that the tales in this cycle pose.

Pitrè cites several variants and parallels from both oral and literary traditions. "Lu Cuntu di Martinu," in his *Otto fiabe e novelle*, is a version from Ficarazza, and he also mentions an unpublished tale from Palermo with a plot similar to this one and the tale about the fool Mammaciucio in number 28 of De Gubernatis' *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*.

### 189. Sdirrameddu—Sdirrameddu

The character of Sdirrameddu has much in common with the stupid wife in tale 186, and both end up getting a beating for their stupidity. A curious motif that connects these two foolish figures is the irrational act of ruining pots and killing chicks by running a cord through them. "Sdirrameddu" is a "speaking name," whose transparent meaning in Sicilian implies that he goes around breaking branches off trees, i.e., he is an unsocialized fool who causes damage wherever he goes. He cannot manage to perform even the simplest tasks, and his sequence of misadventures reaches an almost surreal low point when he decides to act like a pig. These characters differ from Giufà, as Pitrè noted, in that their foolish ideas never have successful outcomes, as Giufà's often do. In this regard Giufà is closer to the archetypal trickster of folk tale and myth, while Sdirrameddu is a purely guileless and helpless figure of fun.

Pitrè noted similarities to Sdirrameddu in the character Pimpi in De Gubernatis's "Pimpi ignudo," *Le novelline di Santo Stefano*, and in the character Don Blasio of Casalicchio's *L'utile col dolce*. He also refers to Coronedi-Berti's "La fola dla Patalocca," *Novelle popolari bolognesi*.

## 190. Giufà—Giufà

The name of Giufà was always modified and changed depending on the village, city, and country. In Sicily, for example, the name is Giucà in Trapani and Giuzà in Piana de' Greci, Palazzo Adriano and other Albanian areas. In Calabria the name is Giurali; in Tuscany, Rome, and The Marches, the name is Giucca. The name of Giufà stems from an Arab tribe, and there are similar figures in Sdirrameddu and in “Maju longu” (Polizzi), “Loccu di li passuli e ficu” (Cerde), and Martinu (Palermo)—all are fantastic characters whose foolish acts are also attributed to Giufà. Others can be found in Trianniscia (Terra d'Otranto), Mato (Venezia), Simonëtt, Bertoldino, and Cacasenno (Piemonte).

1 *Giufà and the Plaster Statue—Giufà e la statua di ghissu*

## ATU 1643—The Broken Image

There is a Neapolitan version, “Vardiello,” in Basile’s *Lo cunto de li cunti*. See also “Giacomino e la pianta dei fagioli” in *Cinque storie della nonna* (Turin, Paravia).

2 *Giufà and the Piece of Cloth—Giufà e la pezza di tila*

## ATU 1642—The Good Bargain

This is a variant of “Giufà and the Plaster Statue.”

3 *Giufà and the Judge—Giufà e lu judici*

There are similar anecdotes in: Imbriani, “La frittatina,” *La novellaja fiorentina*; Croce, *Bertoldo, Bertoldino e Cacasenno* and *Piacevoli e ridicolose semplicità di Bertoldino*. Bertoldino chases after the flies and attacks them. But he is not able to defeat them and calls upon his mother Marcolfa for help. There is also a short episode in the thirteenth night about a fool named Fortunio in Straparola’s *Le piacevoli notti*.

Here is a variant that Pitre included in his collection:

*Giufà Goes to the Judge (Giufà nni li Judici)*

Some flies begin irritating Giufà and stung him. So he went to the judge and filed a complaint. However, the judge laughed and said, “The next time you see flies, hit them with your fist.”

Just at that moment, while the judge was talking, a fly landed on his face, and Giufà quickly hit him with his fist and broke the judge's nose.

*Told by an anonymous person in the district of Denisinni and recorded in Palermo.*

4 *Giufà and the Man with the Cap—Giufà e chiddu di la birritta*

5 *Giufà and the Morning Singer—Giufà e lu canta-matinu*

See the novella of the fourth philosopher in Gaetano, *Storia d'una Crudele Matrigna, ove si narrano piacevoli storie*, and tale 13, night 3 in Straparola, *Le piacevoli notti*.

Here are two interesting variants included in Pitre's collection.

*Giufà and the Cardinal (Giufà e lu cardinali)*

Once upon a time, so it's been told, there was Giufà, and one day his mother wanted to get rid of him and said, "Why don't you go off and hunt? Catch a cardinal for me."

So Giufà took his gun, and just before he left, he asked, "What are cardinals, mama? I don't know what they are."

"Oh you dumb lout! How come you don't know what cardinals are? They're the ones with red heads!"

Now, Giufà went off hunting with his gun. He walked and walked until he arrived at a church, and what did he see? Well, he saw a cardinal who was passing by. When he noticed that he was wearing a red cap on his head, he said, "Oh, what a beautiful cardinal!"

"Boom!"

He fired his gun, and the poor cardinal recoiled and fell dead to the ground without uttering a peep. Very content with himself, Giufà grabbed hold of the cardinal and carried him home on his shoulders. When he arrived at his house, he began to create a racket.

"Mama, mama, come out here and help me carry this cardinal upstairs. He's really large."

When his mother heard him, she raised her voice: "Poor me! What's to be done? . . . What's going to happen?" . . . and since she was in such a rush, she almost fell down the stairs and had an accident.

"How could you do this?" she cried. "You poor fool, do you know whom you've killed? Now they'll send you to the gallows . . . You'll die . . . There's no consolation for me! . . . What am I to do? . . . My son will be the end of me!"

The poor mother trembled all over and felt overwhelmed. Meanwhile, Giufà was very confused, and finally he said to his mother, "Mama, what's

going on? Are you joking with me? After you told me to go hunting and catch a cardinal with a red head, I did what you told me to do, and you've become wild, and now I see you're acting like a wild animal who needs a hundred men to restrain it."

"Get out of here, you poisonous herb! Loafer. You damned soul! What am I going to do with this dead man? . . . Where are we going to bury him? Oh, you're breaking my heart!"

The poor mother could not find any peace and burst into tears.

"It's nothing, mama, don't be afraid," Giufà said. "I'm going to throw him into the well, and on top of him I'll throw some rocks, and we won't talk about it anymore."

So this is what Giufà did. He carried the dead man to the well, threw him in, and then he covered him with rocks and stones. Then he thought it would be a good idea to throw in a dead ram and some more large rocks and gravel so that the well was almost full. After everything was finished, what did he think of doing next? . . . Well, he thought he should go to the judge, and indeed, he did this and told him that a dead cardinal had been thrown into the well of his courtyard. The judge, who was very familiar with Giufà, laughed and said, "Get out of here, you rascal. Go and look after your own business. Get out of here!"

But the judge saw that he refused to leave and kept saying, "Your lordship, come with me. Come, your lordship."

So he said to himself, "Something's wrong here."

After a while, he called the police, and all of them went together to Giufà's house. When they arrived there, the judge said to Giufà, "I want you to climb down there yourself, and we'll see what's there."

Giufà did what the judge said right away. He climbed down into the well, and from there he called up to the judge, "Your lordship, the water's turned into stones, and the dead man's under the stones."

So the policemen lowered a rope with a basket attached to it, and they began to pull up the basket with the rocks that Giufà put into the basket. After a good amount of time passed, Giufà began to shout up to them, "My lords, my lords, the cardinal's grown some horns!"

The judge burst into laughter, and with a good deal of magnanimity, more than ever before, he said to him, "Don't worry about it. Continue picking up the rocks."

And Giufà continued lifting up the rocks, and when the ram was completely uncovered, Giufà cried out again, "There's a ram here!"

Then the judge responded, "Climb out of there, you scoundrel! I've seen how much of an imbecile you are! Another time you'd better not dare

something like this, or you know what will happen to you! Go and work, and go and earn your bread without upsetting anyone. If you don't, I'll catch you and throw you in prison. Get out of here!"

Giufà stood there like a fool, while the judge and the policemen left. Now Giufà's poor mother, who was half dead, began to breathe again because her son had escaped, thanks to the will of God.

Favula, favula, 'un cci nn'è cchiu, No more tales to tell,  
Malu viaggiu quannu fu. This one's gone to hell.

*Told by Anna Maltese and collected by Professor Salvatore Struppa in Marsala.*

### *The Nighttime Singer (Canta-la-notti)*

One time Giufà's mother had a rooster, and one day she cooked it, and they ate it at dinner. Giufà, who had never eaten a rooster before, liked it and asked his mother what it was called. She said it was the nighttime singer. Well, one night Giufà saw a poor young man singing and crowing behind a door. So he took a knife and stabbed him in his heart. Then he carried him home and said to his mother, "Mama, I've brought you the nighttime singer."

As soon as she saw the dead man, his mother was bewildered. Quickly she took the corpse and threw him into the well.

In the meantime the police began to search for the man who had been killed, and Giufà told them that he was the one who had killed him, and he had carried the man to his mother to be cooked. As soon as his mother heard about this, she immediately slaughtered a ram that she had and threw it on top of the dead man in the well. Soon Giufà arrived with the police, who asked her whether Giufà had brought her a dead man, and his mother said he had carried a rotten ram to her, and she had thrown it into the well. One of the policemen climbed down into the well and felt around until he touched the hair. So he yelled above to the relatives of the dead man who were above, "Was he hairy?"

"Perhaps on his chest," they replied.

He felt around some more and touched the four feet.

"Did he have four feet?"

"He had two feet and two hands."

He kept feeling around until he touched the two horns and asked, "Did he have two horns?"

At this point they realized they had been led on a merry goose chase.

*Told by Rosa Brusca in Palermo.*

6 *Giufà and the Semolina—Giufà e la simula*7 *Giufà and the Washed Goatskin—Giufà e la ventri lavata*

A version from Siena with the title “Fignuccio” is in Gradi’s *Proverbi e modi di dire*.

8 *Eat, My Fine Clothing—Manciati, rubbiceddi mei!*9 “*Giufà, Pull the Door!*”—“*Giufà, tirati la porta!*”

This tale is imilar to the first anecdote, “Sdirrameddu” in the *Novella di cascasenno* (Milan, 1870) and to “Patalocca” in Coronedi-Berti’s *Novelle popolari bolognesi*. See also De Gubernatis, “Leggende dei popoli comparati: Lo scicco” in the journal *La civiltà italiana*.

10 *Giufà and the Hen—Giufà e la hjocca*

## ATU 1218—The Numskull Sits on Eggs to Finish the Hatching

There is a version in Croce, *Le sottilissime astuzie di Bertaldo*.

11 *Giufà and the Thieves—Giufà e li latrì*

For other similar versions, see Straparola, “Vilio brigantello ammazza un ladro,” *Le piacevoli notti*; Gonzenbach, “The Fearless Young Man,” *Sicilische Märchen*; Coronedi-Berti, “Patalocca,” *Novelle popolari bolognesi*; Imbriani, “L’esempi di lader,” *La novellaja milanese*; Longo, “La Storia di Giufà,” *Aneddoti siciliani*; Bernoni, “El mato,” *Fiabe popolari veneziane*; Arietti, “Simonëtt,” *Novelle popolari piemontesi*; Maspons y Labrós, “Lo Beneyt,” *Cuentos populars catalans*.

The following version is similar to “Giufà, Pull the Door!” and “Giufà and the Thieves.”

*Stories of Giucà (Cunti di Giucà)*

One time Giucà went to collect some firewood. There were many boys collecting firewood, and after they made their bundles, they left while Giucà remained there. After he had gathered together a bunch of firewood, he returned very slowly to the village. While he was walking, he stopped and rested on top of a grotto. He was tired and decided to urinate and made four streams.

"Run, run, just as I know you'll do," said Giucà.

Beneath him there were some thieves, and they began to run. When Giucà saw those ignoramuses run, he said, "Oh, what fools! I scared them away!"

He picked up his bundle of wood and climbed down into the grotto. There he saw a kettle that was boiling, and he grabbed some meat and a piece of bread and ate. Then he picked up his bundle and went searching for money. When he found a nice sack of gold coins, he wrapped it in the bundle of wood, got up, and went toward Trapani.

As he passed by the door of a house, one of the people cried out, "Giucà, what are you carrying?"

"Firewood," he responded and went home to his mother. When he entered the courtyard, his mother was talking with the neighbors.

"Mama, come here!" Giucà called.

"Oh!" she said. "Are you tired, Giucà?"

"Come inside," he said, "and be quiet."

He untied the bundle of firewood and gave the sack of money to his mother, who hid it because she was no fool.

"Don't you talk about this," she said to her son. "If the law knows about it, we'll both be sent to prison."

His mother went away, took some dried raisins, and figs and climbed on top of the tiled roof. Giucà was sleeping in his bed. So his mother threw the raisins and figs down at him. When this ignoramus awoke and saw the raisins and figs, he cried out, "Mama, mama!"

"What do you want?"

"There are raisins and figs here."

"Pick them up, my son. They're the rain of the Lord."

Some time later Giucà and his mother had a fight, and he yelled at her, "You foolish whore! Give me the money that I brought you, otherwise I'll go to the police."

His mother refused to listen to a word he said, and so Giucà went to the judge.

"Your excellence, I brought a sack of gold coins to my mother, and she won't give me any."

When Giucà's mother learned that she was being summoned by the judge, she said,

"Giucà, I've been summoned by the judge, pull the door tight."

The ignoramus carried the door on his shoulders to the judge.

"You must give the money to your son," the judge said.

"Your excellency, don't you see that my son is mad? Don't you see that he's carrying our door on his shoulders?"

“My lordship,” responded Giucà, “the dried raisins and figs rained from the heavens and that was my signal.”

“Why have you come here?” the judge said to his mother. “Don’t you see that he’s mad?”

*Told by Nicasio Cantanzaro with the nickname Baddazza in Trapani.*

12 “Owl’s Eyes.” “Oww! Oww!”—“Occhi di cucca.” “Ahi! Ahi!”

13 *Giucà and the Bet*—*Giucà e chiddu di la scummissa*

191. The Man with the Bet—Chiddu di la scummissa

This simple tale is little more than a joke about a clever act of theft. Pitрэ found three analogous tales in Casalicchio’s *L’Utile col dolce* and added that one of them is very close to a tale in Cesari’s *Novelle*.

192. The Man with the Donkeys—Chiddu di li scecchi

Tale Type ATU 1288A—Numskull Cannot Find the Donkey He is Sitting On

The title of this tale suggests a pairing with the previous one (“The Man With the Bet”), but the two major protagonists are opposite types, the previous one being a rogue and this one being a simpleton or numskull. If the text we have translated is accurate in its numbering, the man began with fourteen donkeys (including the one he was riding), had one stolen, and then was misled by his well-intentioned friend into thinking he had not lost one after all, because he forgot that when he initially counted thirteen, he had not included the one he was riding. A simpler interpretation is that the narrator mistakenly said “thirteen” for “twelve” in the opening sentence, and the humor consists in the simpleton having initially forgotten to count the donkey he is riding on.

193. Go Bring in the Horse!—Va’ trasi lu cavaddu!

This humorous anecdote offers a marvelous parody of the tendency of husbands and wives to argue at every opportunity, even over a horse that does not yet exist! Pitрэ knew a variant of this story that was published in the Sicilian journal *Favilla* in 1863.

## 194. The Peasant and the Master—Lu burgisi e lu patruni

Pitrè cites Agnolo Firenzuola's *Prima veste dei discorsi degli animali e altre prose* as the basis for this tale.

## 195. The Madman—Lu foddì

Pitrè published a slightly different version of this tale in *Novelline popolari siciliane raccolte in Palermo*. He reported also hearing this story from Neapolitans. He also cites a very similar tale from Somma, "È cosa molto pericolosa il trattar con matti," *Cento racconti* in which the madman's three pieces of advice are virtually identical.

## 196. The Riddle—Lu 'nniminu

Pitrè published a Venetian version of this tale, "La bona Fia," in his *Novelline popolari siciliane* (1873), and cited another from Bernoni, *Indovinelli popolari veneziani* (1874). He noted that the motif of the daughter nursing her own father goes back to the Roman writer Valerius Maximus (early first century A.D.), who records it as an instance of filial piety in his *Factorum Dictorumque Memorabilium*.

## 197. Three Good Pieces of Advice—Li tri rigordi

Tale Type ATU 910B—The Observance of the Master's Precepts and ATU 910—The Clever Precepts

This tale enjoyed a wide distribution as a moral exemplum in Europe and the Near East during the medieval and Renaissance periods. Versions exist in *The Forty Vezirs* and *The Thousand and One Nights*, as well as in Latin medieval texts such as the epic *Ruodlieb* (c.1000) and the *Gesta Romanorum* (fourteenth century), and in *El Conde Lucanor* by Don Juan Manel (1282–1348). Most versions contain the key motifs: the last piece of advice serving to keep the protagonist from murdering his wife and son; the bread or cake which is not to be opened until the end and contains money or treasure. Gonzenbach's "Three Good Pieces of Advice," *Sicilianische Märchen*, is another variant of this tale.

198. The Story of the Riddle—*Lu cuntu di lu 'nniminu*

## Tale Type ATU 875A—Girl's Riddling Answer Betrays a Theft and ATU 875—The Clever Farmgirl

This tale has some similarity to “The Talking Belly” (“*La panza chi parra*”) in this collection and “*Lu re e la figghia di lu mercanti*” in Pitrè, *Fiabe e leggende popolari siciliani*, and a version of the same riddle appears in Pitrè's *Canti popolari siciliani* (vol. 2, n. 888). Close variants are Gonzenbach, “The Clever Farmer's Daughter,” *Sicilianische Märchen*, and Comparetti, “*La Ragazza Astuta*,” *Novelline popolari italiane*. The central element of type 875—the girl becoming the king's bride through performing his riddling tasks or interpreting his symbolic actions—is absent from our tale (although it appears in the Gonzenbach and Comparetti variants). The following tale, “The Story of the Song,” offers a curious combination of parallels and opposites to this tale. See the Endnote to 199.

199. The Story of the Song—*Lu cuntu di la canzuna*

This short tale tells the complex story of a jilted woman's revenge, with an ingenious heroine who gets away with murder. The young woman's feelings are not revealed until the end of the story, when she sings her song and performs her deed. Only then do we fully understand that this is the tale of a poor commoner's revenge against a royal seducer. We must assume that the king's son has succeeded in compromising the poor maiden's honor—exactly as her grandmother feared—although the narrator never makes this explicit. There is a delicious pungency in the poetry of the murderer's love-song: the first five lines seem like a conventional serenade outside a lover's window, then the sixth line surprises us with its deadly reference. Pitrè apparently paired this tale with the preceding one because each has a clever and enterprising heroine who creates a poem (the first a riddle, the second a serenade) to sum up the crucial reality at the heart of the story. Despite this parallel, the two tales conclude very differently, since the king of the second tale, by not following his heart, loses the maiden's love and his own life as well.

There is a similarity between this tale and “The Snake Who Bore Witness for a Maiden” in Gonzenbach's *Sicilianische Märchen*. A young peasant girl is raped by a prince in that tale, and a snake helps her get revenge. However, she does not kill the prince. Instead, he is compelled to marry her.

## 200. Peter Fullone and the Egg—*Petru Fudduni e l'ovu*

According to Pitрэ this anecdote has always been associated with Dante Alighieri, the great Italian poet, who lived in Florence. There is a block of stone built into a house on the east side of the cathedral in Florence with the inscription: "Sasso di Dante" (Dante's Stone). Legend has it that Dante used to sit on this stone on summer evenings, and one time a man came by and asked him to tell him what was the best food for a man to eat. Dante replied, "An egg." A year later the same man came by and asked, "With what?" and Dante responded immediately, "With salt."

For more information on Peter Fullone, see Papanti, *Dante, secondo la tradizione e i novellatori* and Pitрэ, "Pietro Fullone e le sfide popolari siciliane," in *Studi di poesia popolare*.

## 201. The Fisherman Vitu Lùcchiu—*Ràisi Vitu Lùcchiu*

Pitрэ notes that this tale was told to him on the night of August 22, 1873 in the Burgarella Hotel in Trapani. The narrator, Nicisio Catanzaro, was very lively and gesticulated wildly with his hands while applauding the hero, the fisherman Vitu Lucchiu, who personified for him the courage and heroism of the people of Trapani.

## 202. The Captain and the General—*Lu capitanu e lu ginirali*

Pitрэ claimed that this tale is one that is probably more common outside of Sicily. However, there are similar motifs to be found in some of the other tales of his collection, for instance, in number 11, "My Three Beautiful Crowns," and in number 114, "The Betrayal." He also recorded the following version as an example of other tales that could be found in Sicily.

### *Whoever Does Harm Can Expect to be Harmed (Cui fa mali, mali aspetta)*

A husband and a wife promised to cry at each other's tomb depending on who died first. Then the wife died, and the husband went to cry at her tomb the entire night. All at once he noticed a snake crawling on to his wife's stomach, and at midnight it scampered away. The same thing happened the second night and also the third night, except that the snake carried a bunch of flowers with it on this last night. The husband and wife made their way out of the tomb with the flowers. While on the road, the husband fell asleep on the legs of his wife. A captain passed by, and she fled with him, abandoning her husband. When the husband woke up, he went to Sciacca where he stayed at

the house of a friend. While there, he heard that the captain was enjoying himself with his wife. Then he went to one of their festivities and was killed and cut into pieces. His friend pieced him back together and had him smell the bunch of flowers. The husband came back to life. Then he used the flowers to revive the wife of the general commander of the king's troops. In Naples the queen died, and the husband was promoted to viceroy. As viceroy he returned to Sciacca and ordered a funeral pyre to be prepared. Soon thereafter he ordered his ungrateful wife and the sad captain to be burned to death on the pyre.

### 203. The Tuna Viceroy—*Lu viciarrè tunnina*

Pitrè wrote that he collected a version of this tale in Salaparuta that differed only in its title—"The Prince of Pignatelli" (*Lu principi di Pignatelli*)—and in some minor circumstances. This tale was very common in all of Sicily.

### 204. The King and the Prisoners—*Lu re e li carzarati*

According to Pitrè, this tale was traditionally told throughout all of Sicily. Another version, "La visita della galera," can be found in Antonio Longo's *Aneddoti siciliani raccontati* and also in Somma, *Cento racconti*.

### 205. The Beauty of Icara—*La bedda di Lìccari*

Pitrè provided the following variant and comment from his book, *Canti popolari siciliani*.

#### *The Beauty of Icara (La bedda di Lìccari)*

The most beautiful woman of this world lived in a small village by the sea. One day she saw a ship approach, and many soldiers came on land and attacked Icara, which they sacked and set on fire. Some of the inhabitants fled; some were taken prisoners. But the beautiful woman of Icara, thanks to her extraordinary beauty, was saved. In short, under the protection of these foreigners, she was able to found a new Icara better than the one that existed before.

*Collected in Carini*

It is apparent that this traditional tale of Carini and Borgetto refers to the extremely beautiful Laïs, who was one of the three famous courtesans of antiquity. The historical origin of this legend is that the Greek general Nicias

sided with the Segestans, enemies of the Icarians, and went to Sicily to besiege, conquer, and destroy Icara. Having accomplished this, he took Laïs back with him along with some other booty. She was still a young girl, and her mother was Epimandra or Timandra. Nicias brought them to Greece, where Laïs was enthusiastically received and admired by everyone. The historians recount that all of Greece was aflame for her. Her words, sayings, and bon mots were enough to charm all those who flocked to purchase her favor at any cost. She said that she knew the philosophers and had read their books, but she also knew that they did not knock any less at her door than others did. Demosthenes stopped at her place one time and, terrified by her demand to pay 10 crowns to spend only one night by her side, uttered that worthy saying: "I won't buy such an expensive repentance."

#### 206. Mohammed—Maumettu

Pitrè recalls that in his youth he had heard a tale about Mohammed from a certain Giovannino Pirrone, son of the shoemaker Alessandro, on the street of the Collegio di Maria in Borgo, and it went like this: Mohammed was enclosed in an iron coffin that was suspended in air due to the powers of a rock that was called lodestone. In order to make the coffin fall to the ground there was a great expedient: you were to take a piece of garlic, break it, and hit it against the coffin because garlic worked against a lodestone (magnet). But who would dare to do such a thing in the time of Mohammed? The Turks who adored this god would have torn that person into a thousand pieces. In Turkey that person would have been burned at the stake.

In Sicilian dialect the name of Mohammed is used when one wants to refer to the oaths or curses of the Turks.

#### 207. The Evil King Guglielmo—Lu malu Gugghiermu

Pitrè published two versions of this tale in the *Archivio storico siciliano*, one collected in Palermo and the other in Cerda. Since this tale was so important, he published the two variants below.

##### *I. King Guglielmo the Bad—Gugghiermu lu malu*

Gentlemen, it's been told that once there were two kings, Guglielmo the Bad and Guglielmo the Good. The good king always lived at Monreale and built a large cathedral there as high as the sky, and the bad king lived in Palermo.

Now Guglielmo the Bad caused some trouble by revising how gold, silver, and copper money would be used and distributed. Like Vittorio Emmanuele

he began to withdraw all the gold, silver, and copper coins from circulation, and instead, he had money manufactured out of leather.

After many years had passed, it occurred to him to see if there was still someone in his kingdom who had money made of gold, silver, or copper. He took a mare and pretended that he wanted to sell it at the Quattru Cantuneri.

“Whoever has some gold coins can have this horse.”

But there was no one who had any money to buy it!

The news about the horse spread to a prince, who exclaimed, “What a beautiful mare!” So he went to his mother and said, “Your majesty, can you give me some gold coins.”

“My son, not even if you turn this place upside down will you find a single gold coin.”

The poor boy could not be consoled. Finally, his mother looked at him and said, “My son, in antiquity, people were buried in the tombs with a gold coin in their mouths, because gold kept them strong as it joined with the body. Go to the cloister of the friars where your grandfather is buried, and take the gold coin from his mouth.”

The boy went and found his grandfather’s corpse. He moved it, stuck his hand into the corpse’s mouth, and pulled out the coin. Then he ran to the Quattru Cantuneri and cried out, “I’m here for the horse!”

“You’re under arrest,” the guards burst out. They grabbed hold of him and took him to the palace where the king said, “Ahh! You disgraceful thing! Don’t you know my orders!”

“Your majesty, I got this coin from the tombs of the friars. In olden times they buried the dead people with a coin in their mouths.”

“Very well,” replied the king. “If things are as you say they are, I’ll set you free. If not, you’ll be hung on the gallows.”

Guglielmo the Bad took the key to the tombs and went to the friars to verify everything. And when he went down into the tombs he had all the corpses searched and the coins taken from their mouths. And nobody can forget what he did because he was so disgraceful and showed no respect for the dead.

*Told by Agatuzza Messina in Palermo.*

## II. King Guglielmo the Bad—*Gugghiermu lu malu*

When Guglielmo the Bad ruled Sicily (this was the way Sicily always was, badly treated), he ordered all the gold, silver, and bronze coins withdrawn from circulation and had money minted in leather. Now one time the king offered a spirited horse for sale for a gold coin. He had the horse taken around all of Palermo, and his servants arrived at a square where many people had

gathered beneath the palace of the Prince Marvagna, who had died some time ago, and his son saw the beautiful horse and said to the steward of the palace, who was by his side, "Oh, how magnificent that horse is! If only I could own it! But how can I give them a gold coin when there's no money to be found under the sun."

When the steward saw how excited the prince was, he remarked, "Don't say anything. I want you to know that your father was a great man, and when he died, they put a gold coin in his mouth because that was the custom. Here's what we'll do—we'll go to the cemetery where we'll find a monk or friar who'll help us open the tomb so that we can get a coin."

And this is what they did. The friar opened the tomb, and then they opened the dead prince's coffin and pulled out the gold coin from his mouth, for it was there just as they had placed it, even though the body had rotted. Then they took the gold coin and went straight to the king's palace to buy the horse.

"Here's the gold coin," they said to the guards. "The horse is sold."

Then they left.

"How's this possible," the king said, after he saw the gold coin. "Is there still some gold around? Who has bought the horse?"

"Prince Marvagna's son," the guards said.

"Bring him here immediately!"

When the prince was brought before Guglielmo the Bad, the king said, "Aren't you afraid to appear before Guglielmo the Bad, King of Sicily? Tell me, how is it that you still have gold coins? Don't you know that I issued a decree against having this money. Who gave you this gold coin?"

The prince, who was trembling, replied, "Your majesty, you know that my father died before you came to Sicily, and upon his death his people put a gold coin in his mouth as was the custom for rich people. When I saw the horse, my heart burst with a great desire to buy it, and I didn't know what to do. So, the steward of my palace informed me that there was a gold coin in my father's mouth. Then we went to the convent, where a friar opened the tomb, and that was how I was able to buy the horse."

Well, Guglielmo the Bad had the friar summoned, and the friar, who was totally frightened, told him everything, but he was so scared that he lost control of himself. After the king heard all this, he gave them permission to leave and rewarded them with a small bronze coin for having revealed everything. If they hadn't, he would have had them executed.

*Told by Vincenzo-Giuseppe Marotta in Cerda.*

Pitrè makes reference to Francesco Maurolico's *Compendio della storia di Sicilia*:

Many have written that Guglielmo (the Bad) was very miserly because he decreed that money was to be made out of leather after he had ordered all the gold and silver to be brought to his treasury. To make sure that there was no gold left anywhere, he had a magnificent horse exhibited and offered for sale for one gold coin. The horse was bought by a young boy who paid for the horse with a gold coin. The king wanted to know where he got the money from, and the boy told him that he had obtained it from the tomb of his father. People in antiquity customarily put a gold coin in the mouths of dead people who could perhaps use it to give to the boatman Charon in the underworld.—This was how Guglielmo was able to determine that there was no longer any more gold in his kingdom.

In referring to this note in his *Della cronologia universalis della sicilia*, Francesco Aprile asserts that he does not “remember having read this in any ancient author” and doubts whether there were many authors who recorded this story, and Fazello does not mention any authors. It was, however, Tommaso Fazello, the leading historian and mathematician of Messina, who wrote that “Guglielmo I issued a decree for all the cities, castles, and villages on the island of Sicily that the people were to bring to the king all the silver and gold minted or non-minted, and in exchange, they were to receive money made out of leather, and he ordered that the people were to use only this money to buy and sell things. If they did not comply with this decree, they would be decapitated. Because of this decree, all the people of Sicily came running in hordes out of fear for their lives and brought gold and silver money or articles and ornaments made out of gold and silver. But the king wanted to learn whether some one had acted against the decree. So he had one of his men dressed in disguise and sent him to Palermo with a magnificent and sturdy horse in order to sell it for one gold coin. He went around the city to spread the news with the blare of a trumpet that he was selling a horse, but he could not find anyone to buy it for a gold coin. He did find people who were willing to buy the horse with the same value in leather money, but the seller would only settle for a gold coin. Finally, a young nobleman saw the horse and fell in love with it. So he went to his father’s tomb, descended, and took a gold coin from his dead father’s mouth that his mother had put there when the father was buried. Afterward the nobleman gave the gold coin to the seller and took the horse home with him. Guglielmo heard about this and realized that great scarcity of money had led the young man to undertake such a wicked and ignoble deed and recognized that he now possessed all the gold and silver of the island. So he began to feel satisfied by his avarice.” (*L’Historia di Sicilia*, translated by Remigio Fiorentino, vol. 8, chapter 3)

Pitrè notes that, after Fazello and Maurolico, there were other historians of Sicily who recorded this event. Among the accounts written by all the historians, the one by Giuseppe Buonfiglio Costanzo in *Messina città nobilissima* stands out because he captured the insatiable avidity of Guglielmo. According to Pitrè, this tale was so well known during the times of Fazello that it had been preserved up through his own times so that there was not a person among the common people whether in the city or country who was not horrified when listening to it.

Today, however, Pitrè asked, whether the time had not come to unveil the truth of this story. "I shall not dare tell it out of respect for those who worry about certain circumstances that may be untrue or inexact—it is natural that the oral stories of the common people are inexact, or rather misinformed. But when an account or story from a univocal tradition is disseminated over centuries, is it legitimate to doubt the facts that are in this account which agree with so many others about the avaricious life of King Guglielmo? But we must not forget a fact narrated by the author of the *Cronichi di quisto Regno di Sicilia* (in the *Cronache Xiciliane* of Vincenzo Di Giovanni, Bologna, 1865). He remarks that when the Sicilian ambassadors reported to Charles of Anjou about the disorder created by the French in Sicily, 'that king responded by saying, you have been too good. I shall have you use money in exchange as it was done in the past.' "

Pitrè published all of the above in the *Archivio storico* (March 14, 1873) and was interested in demonstrating how durable and truthful the tales about Guglielmo were. On May 27, 1873, Professor Adolf Holm picked up the same argument in a letter to the Barone Raffaele Starrabba that was published in the *Archivio storico* under the heading, "Intorno alla leggenda di Guglielmo il Malo," and Pitrè published in his notes the principal argument:

"My friend Dr. Pitrè has published two versions of the popular tale concerning King Guglielmo in the first issue of the *Archivio* and showed that this tale was considered worthy to be recognized as historical fact by Fazello, Maurolico, Bonfiglio, and others. Permit me to recall the incidents that make up this little story. King Guglielmo had all the gold, silver, and copper coins of the island brought to his treasury. In exchange he minted money made out of leather to be used by the people. Then, to make sure that there was no metal money hidden anywhere, he sent out a beautiful horse to be sold for a gold coin. A young man fell in love with the horse, and not knowing how to obtain a gold coin to buy it, he went to his father's tomb, took out a gold coin from the mouth of the corpse that had been placed there when he had been buried, and with this money he purchased the horse. I shall leave out the part that follows because it has no importance for my purposes. The popular tales that Pitrè recounted add some characteristic details to this little story that the storytellers told him. The horse is sold at the "Quattru Cantuneri"; the father is entombed at "the friars"; the young man is a "prince," the son of Prince Marvagna. None of these details are from the period of Guglielmo I, but the foundation of the story is the same.

Now, it appears to me, Baron, that this tale is of more significance than it seems at first sight, and that all that concerns history—and I am not saying Sicilian history but history in general—can be recognized thanks to the publication of Dr. Pitrè. The story is a most rare or rather unique example, and at the same time, a most clear example of the tenacity of what we call popular tradition. It provides proof that this tradition always conserves the recollection of antiquity, something that the same writers of antiquity did not do. Let me explain.

Dr. Pitrè said correctly that the words of the story contained inexact references, but the fact announced in it was very much in agreement with other stories about King Guglielmo, and in regard to this, he cited a passage from *Cronichi di quisto regno di sicilia*, published by Professor Vincenzo Di Giovanni (Bologna, 1865), in which Charles of Anjou responded to the Sicilian ambassadors when they complained about the bad government of the French, "I shall have you use money in exchange as it was done in the past." Hence, it could be said that King Guglielmo enriched himself by taking all the gold coins, etc. and then minting money made of leather.

But the rest of the story is a recollection of antiquity and does not belong to the medieval period. The proof lies in the way that the young man procured the gold coin. You can determine this, Baron, by studying how the storytellers went through so much trouble to justify the presence of a gold coin in the mouth of a corpse that was a custom in ancient Greece, but not one that can be found among the Sicilian people in the medieval period and not under the reign of Guglielmo. Fazello said, "the mother had placed the gold coin in her husband's mouth when he was buried" no doubt because he did not know any other reason for her to act the way she did. Maurolico said, "People in antiquity practiced the custom of putting a gold coin in the mouths of dead people who could perhaps use it to give to the boatman Charon in the underworld." All very well, but we are not dealing with the period of antiquity. The story takes place during the epoch of Guglielmo I. This is why Buonfiglio believes that he has to say, "And we believe that this superstition is now used by the Saracens, who, depending on the class and condition of the dead person, put money in the mouth to pay the charges of Charon." Anyone can see that this explanation is not worth anything. The popular versions published by Dr. Pitrè also talk about the fact that this custom is no longer in use. The storyteller from Palermo says, "gold retains its value and adapts to the corpse." This detail regarding the coin in the mouth of the dead person is, therefore, proof that the story originated in antiquity and was spread by word of mouth up to our day. This is already a relevant fact, but it seems to me that one can go even further. That is, we can find the name of the king in antiquity who is the original one of our story.

This king was Dionysius the Elder, famous in antiquity for his avarice and for his shrewdness and impudence that enabled him to steal money from his subjects. It was he, according to the testimony of Aristotle, who placed tin money in circulation instead of gold and silver, and this money was worth four times less than gold and silver. Later, Guglielmo the Bad will adopt practically the same strategy to cheat the people of Syracuse of their fortune. Aristotle tells another story about how Dionysius had imposed taxes so heavy that the people finally refused to pay them, saying that there was no more money. It seems that the tyrant was satisfied for the moment, but a little later, under the pretext of always needing more money, he had his instruments put on sale. The people of Syracuse were foolish enough to think about buying them. So the king took their money but retained his instruments, and he could exalt himself by taking out the money that he had hidden.

Thus we have found two of the three characteristic traits of our tale in the story

of Dionysius—the king who had money minted in an unusual material that is relatively vile, and the sale of an object ordered by the tyrant that cannot be bought since there is no money that the people can use to buy it. In the histories of antiquity these two facts are not known. The popular tradition has supplied us with them exaggerating at the same time the lack of money and how the people were put to a test. The third characteristic trait cannot be found recorded by any historian of antiquity. But it is of such a nature that one cannot say it was invented in the medieval period. Therefore, it is more appropriate to note its existence in the living popular tradition. It proves that the tale conserved by Fazello and the same people of his time is truly an original tale that existed in antiquity, but was not written down, at least as far as we know, and it has been preserved only by word of mouth of the common people up to the sixteenth century when Fazello noted it down in his book. It is thus easily understood how this was transmitted. The Sicilians took the place of the Greeks, and the name of the avaricious king was forgotten. And when the government of the island was passed into the hands of a man with a reputation no less cruel and avaricious, Guglielmo I, the people, happy to give a name to the tyrant of the story, immediately attributed these traits to the offspring of Tancred d'Hauteville.

Now that I believe I have proven how much the tale is relatively connected to the facts themselves, I am pleased to add some reflections that will illuminate the importance of all this. Those who occupy themselves with the study of comparative mythology and folk tales of different people know that the names, the historical periods, and the traditional characters are frequently changed. The character who was earlier a god becomes, after some time, a hero and finally a man. The goddesses transform themselves into women of the people. Since there is a mythical foundation to the folk tales, it is possible to trace the early origins of the tale via the characters of the people and immediately to ascertain its variations. On the other hand, this demonstrates that the change of names is characteristic for the popular tales. These facts are always the most important for the people; the names are selected according to the epoch in which they are told. Therefore, we can conclude that even in the other tales in which there is a historical foundation the same change has taken place. And in fact, this change exhibits examples of a value more limited. There are particulars of the life of famous men that return in the story two or three times almost in the same way, but these belong always to ancient history. In contrast, the tale about the young man who buys the king's horse with the money taken from the mouth of his father's corpse connects antiquity with the medieval period and shows a fluid current of popular poetry that transfuses itself from one period to the next. The laws that regulate the mythical tales have the same force for the stories. Neither the passing of centuries nor changed circumstances exist for them.

Was I right, my revered Baron, when I said that the oral tale is extremely important for history in general? History does not consist only of facts. With regard to the facts, the tales will be without value, and nobody wants to claim that the story which

we have been treating really took place at Syracuse—but history also deals with opinions, and under this aspect doesn't the tale told by a woman in Palermo in the nineteenth century have any interest and can't we learn something from how she thought and told her tale about Dionysius the Elder and the people of Syracuse during the fourth or third century before Christ?

A. Holm

This is how the gifted author of *Geschichte Siciliens im Alterthum* has set the record straight for our full consideration.

## 208. Guglielmo the Good—Gugghiermu lu bonu

Pitrè remarked that the temple of Monreale erected by Guglielmo II called the Good is so famous that it deserves some note to record its origins. First of all see the monumental work of Domenico Benedetto Gravina, *Il duomo di Monreale*. The religious vision that was current at the time of this tale was recorded in Mons. Testa's *De vita et rebus gestis Guilelmi II*, p. 207):

One day the young prince went hunting as was his custom, and he went outside the city of Monreale not more than four miles from the royal residence. He stopped hunting and sat down to rest in front of a Carob tree near the church of Saint Ciriaca. When he was overtaken by sleep, the radiant light of the Mother of God appeared in his dream and informed him that there were hidden treasures beneath the spot where he was sleeping. She lovingly urged him to follow a career with Christian piety and to use the money of the treasure for sacred purposes and relieve his subjects. As a result, Guglielmo decided to build a temple dedicated to the Virgin Mary at that same spot. The discovered treasures were used faithfully in the name of that heavenly appearance. Guglielmo set to work immediately and gave orders to build the temple, etc.

Mention of this popular tale can be found in Giovanni Evangelista di Blasi, *Storia del regno di sicilia dall'epoca oscura e favolosa sino al 1770*, vol. 5 and Isidoro La Lumia, *Studi di storia siciliana* (vol. 1). In Salvatore Salomone-Marino's *La storia nei canti popolari siciliani*, there is a song by S. Giuseppe Jato that celebrates the temple. There is also a common saying, prevalent in Sicily, that alludes to the temple and asserts that whoever goes to Palermo and does not travel up to Monreale to see the Dome "leaves as an ass and returns as a beast."

*Cu' va 'n Palermu e 'un vidi Murriali,  
Si nni parti asinu, e si nni torna armali.*

This pious legend was portrayed in a beautiful painting by Pietro Novelli, and it can be found on the stairs of the Monastery of the Benedicts in Monreale. And here is another version of this tale:

*The Emperor Guglielmo (Lu 'Mperaturi Gugghiermu)*

In the olden days there was an emperor in Sicily, and he was called Guglielmo. Now this emperor was devoted to the beautiful Holy Mother, and he wanted to build a church dedicated to her at the royal residence. But times were hard, and the emperor could not do what was in his heart. One day he went hunting. When he reached Monreale, he was tired and drowsy. So he lay down beneath a Carob tree. While he was sleeping the beautiful holy Mother appeared to him and told him in his dream, "Listen to what you must do. Beneath the spot where you are sleeping there is an enormous treasure that nobody in the world has ever seen. Dig it out and take it. Then build me the temple that you've desired to build."

The emperor awoke completely dazed, but the dream seemed true to him. He ordered his men to dig, and "Oh, what fortune!" They found masses of gold coins. So, Guglielmo kneeled and thanked the great Mother of God, and he immediately ordered all the master artisans in his realm to build a great temple, the richest and the most beautiful in the world. This was how the church at Monreale came to be, and it is unique, the only one of its kind on earth. It is so genuine that people from all over the earth come to Monreale to see it and to take pleasure in viewing the masses of gold and precious stones. *Told by Pietro Geraci at Partinico.*

209. Frederick the Emperor—Fidiricu 'Mperaturi

Pitrè notes that the name of Frederick II the Swabian has remained strong in the memory of the people in both good and bad ways. In another tale of Palermo about "Petra di lu 'Mperaturi" the edge of a cliff of Monte Pellegrino north of Palermo is celebrated because the Emperor Frederick had decreed that it was a sign to the workers when they were to stop work.

In the past most people believed that there was a reason why Frederick was born, as the enemy of God and the church, especially since he was the son of a nun (Constance) who, after breaking her vows, married the 50-year-old Henry VI soon thereafter. In addition many historians of this period have written about the way Frederick had people buried alive. Pitrè notes that popular oral tradition preserves this memory in the form of the proverb, "What a Disaster for the Three Ladies!" (*Li tri donni e chi mali cci avvinni!*), which is the basis for tale 295.

## 210. The Sicilian Vespers—*Lu vèspiru sicilianu*

The Sicilian Vespers is the name historians give to the people's uprising against French rule that began just outside of Palermo on Easter Monday at vespers on March 30, 1282. The rebellion spread throughout the island and eventually led to the expulsion of the French, who had occupied Sicily since 1266 when Pope Urban IV gave the island to Charles of Anjou (King Charles I of Naples) to rule. The French officials badly mistreated the Sicilian population with rape, theft, and murder, leading to the popular revolt, which marked an important turning point in Sicilian and European history. The story of the insurrection entered folk tradition as an oral tale that is very dear to the hearts of Sicilians and is still recited to this day. All variants emphasize the sexual abuse of the French soldiers and the use by the Sicilians of "ciceru" as a shibboleth, and most of them feature Giovanni Procida as organizer of the revolt and conclude with the French burning Sicily in effigy. The unique role of Sperlinga is noteworthy as the one town friendly to the French. While our tale implies Procida was a Sicilian, the historical John of Procida was actually a Neapolitan physician. His important role is acknowledged by historians, although it remains unclear to what extent he organized a full-scale conspiracy. The classic study of this event, Steven Runciman's *The Sicilian Vespers*, sets the incident within the complicated European politics of the time and has a special appendix on John of Procida. See also Luigi Natoli, *Vespri siciliani* and Michele Amari, *Racconto popolare del vespro siciliano*.

Pitrè reprinted four variants he had previously published in a Sicilian journal and a fifth not previously published. He also added a sixth variant as tale 211, which follows. In 1822, he subsequently published a volume titled *Il vespro siciliano nelle tradizioni popolari della Sicilia*, which contains twenty-four local versions of the story from different parts of Sicily as well as proverbs, songs, children's games, and customs connected with the story.

## 1

Gentlemen, it's been told that once the Frenchmen were in Sicily, and they began taking all the unmarried girls for themselves and occupied all the houses they wanted to. Now the Palermitans are not the kind of people to put up lightly with insult, and so they began making plans in secret. This hidden flame smoldered secretly for three years, while the French acted like masters throughout all Sicily. Well, you can abuse us now and abuse us again, and

you'll see we're not made of wood! The day came when an outrage was committed at a religious celebration, and all the Palermitans came out armed and ready to settle the score. Wherever they found a Frenchman, they ordered, "Say 'ciceru'!" and when anyone answered "chicheru," they would put him to death. They piled up the dead men as high as a mountain, and the four who were left took to their heels. The news of this deed spread throughout the world and gave rise to the saying, "I detest him like a Frenchman." And now in France, every year, they take a map of Sicily and burn it. And a Palermitan simply cannot stand the French. But the Palermitans of today aren't capable of performing deeds like this.

*Told by Agatuzza Messia in Palermo.*

## 2

They tell the story that once the French came to the city of Palermo. These Frenchmen wanted to dominate everything. So any woman who got married had to spend the first night by sleeping with a Frenchman. Well, the Palermitans were so disgusted with this that they began plotting. There was a man called Procita who was disguised as a monk, and he said, "Do you know what we're going to do? On March 31 there's a religious feast outside of Palermo. When the French appear to do their usual thing, we'll make our own kind of feast, and that will be the end of them." This monk went around among the men of Palermo sounding a little trumpet and whispering in their ears. "What is that man doing?" asked the French. "Nothing," came the answer. "The poor fellow is crazy."

On March 31 the event took place, and the Palermitans revolted. Whenever they found a Frenchman, they made him say "ciceru," and whoever answered "chicheru" was killed. And that was the end of them all.

This event was talked about throughout the world, and the French can never forget it. They say that every year in France they build a city out of straw and then burn it, signifying that if the French ever came to Sicily again, they would burn the island like straw.

*Told by a woman named Cottone in Ficarizzi.*

## 3

In times long ago, the French took over Sicily, and French soldiers came into all the houses and took the women. They ridiculed and insulted the Sicilians, and their arrogance reached the point where they had a boatload of barrels sent from France to Sicily, which had salted fish on top while the bottom was

filled with horns.<sup>314</sup> This went on for a few years, until the Sicilians couldn't stand it any longer and decided to kill the Frenchmen. Then a great man called Giuanni of Procida feigned madness and circulated throughout the major cities where the French had their soldiers, holding a horn and making sounds on it—*bu bu bu*. He whispered in the ear of all the Sicilians he met, "At nine in the evening we're going to kill the Frenchmen," but to the Frenchmen he simply played *bu bu* on his horn. When the French asked what this man was doing, our people simply said that he was crazy.

When the day finally arrived, the Palermitans killed them all, the soldiers and their townsmen, and whenever they didn't know if someone was French, they made him say "ciceru," and if he said "chicheru" they slit his throat. After four months, when no Frenchmen were left alive, they took the barrels that had contained horns and filled them with the genitals of the Frenchmen, well salted, and sent them in a galley to the King of France.

*Collected from the peasant Francesco Arcidiacono by Salvatore-Pasquale Vigo in Etna.*

#### 4

It's been told that once there was a great war, and afterwards there were French soldiers in Sicily who took certain liberties, and here's how it began. Whenever a woman at that time got married, and her husband was a peasant, she had to go to bed first with a French soldier. If her husband wore a gentleman's hat, he had to patiently endure having a lieutenant in his bed; and so on. This practice made it impossible for each man to be master of his own freedom, and finally they felt compelled to put an end to it once and for all. There was a very clever priest, and do you know what he did? He spent seven years traveling throughout Sicily, and in every town he shared his plot with his fellows, saying that at the hour of vespers on a certain day there would be a general revolt throughout Sicily. Because he spent seven years doing this, there was no town he hadn't visited. When he had finished traveling, he returned to Palermo. At the hour of vespers they had a terrible uprising and killed lots of Frenchmen. This revolt took place at about the same hour in all the towns.

But how did they manage to single out only the Frenchmen? Well, the Sicilians had found out that the French could not pronounce "ciceru," and whenever they tried to say the word, it came out "chicheru" or even "siseru." "Now," they said, "we have a perfect test: all we have to do is kill everyone who can't say 'ciceru'." And so the Sicilians went to every house and did the

314 The traditional symbol of cuckolds, evoking the familiar insult *cornutu* (cuckold).

same thing everywhere, demanding that each person pronounce exactly as they did. They did, however, make an occasional blunder and kill a Sicilian, because you know the saying, “the small kegs get mixed in with the big barrels.” They had a festival and everything went as planned. Enough said. In one single evening they massacred all the Frenchmen—except for the ones who were in a town called Sperlinga. These survived, because the townspeople there didn’t want to go along with what the priest had said.<sup>315</sup>

*Collected from a peasant called Bellina by Vincenzo Gialongo in Polizzi-Generosa.*

## 5

The French had a claim on every young woman who was getting married, and it went according to rank. If she was marrying a peasant, it was a soldier who got her; if she was marrying a gentleman, it was a lieutenant. And if—let’s suppose—she was marrying a baron, it was a general.

Well now, there was a shoemaker<sup>316</sup> whose daughter was about to marry, and he was desperate not to allow the French to have this honor. So he began circulating throughout all of Sicily telling everyone to prepare for an uprising at the hour of vespers at a religious festival, and they would get rid of all the Frenchmen in Sicily. And the order he gave was carried out perfectly.

Now, the French call chickpeas “chichiri” while Sicilians call them “ciceri.” So as people came out of the church, if someone said “chichiri,” they were instantly on the ground, but those who said “ciceri” were freed. And by this means all of the Frenchmen were eliminated within half an hour. This was a “festival” carried out by everyone in Sicily on a single day, because otherwise they wouldn’t have been able to accomplish it all in half an hour.

After the Sicilians had killed the French, they proclaimed a king for themselves—but I can’t think of his name. And the hatred that the French had for the Sicilians after that event was so great that, in perpetual remembrance of the destruction done on that day, they make a map of Sicily every year and then burn it.

*Told by Carlo Loria (nicknamed Bònchiaro) in Salaparuta.*

315 Pitre notes that the people of Sperlinga had a saying in Latin, “Sola Sperlinga negavit,” “Sperlinga alone said ‘no.’” This is actually the latter half of a verse inscription over the gate of the old castle in Sperlinga that reads, “Quod Siculis placuit sola Sperlinga negavit,” “Only Sperlinga said ‘no’ to what pleased the Sicilians.”

316 Pitre adds that popular opinion believed this shoemaker to be John of Procida.

211. The Slaughter of the French at Trapani—Lu tagghia-tagghia di li francisi 'n Trapani

This is one more variant of tale 210 on the Sicilian Vespers, and it features the major themes seen in that tale and the variants given in its endnote. The addition of the ten deaf mutes and the one speaking man carrying the message is unique to this version.

212. The Rock of the Bad Council—Lu schiogghiu di lu malu cunsigghiu

This is a short etiological or explanatory tale about how a rock on the Trapani seacoast received its name. It is interesting to note that the council is called “bad” even though it created a successful plan to turn against the oppressors and kill them. We should understand the term “bad” here to mean something like “grim” or “deadly.”

213. The Gallic Tomb—Tumma-Gallia

This very brief explanatory tale accounts for a feature of landscape at the town of Mineo that was named after the mass burial of the slaughtered Frenchmen.

214. Beautiful Angiolina—La bella Angiolina

This tale is unusual in Pitрэ’s collection for being published in Italian and not Sicilian. (Thus the title has the Italian *bella* rather than the Sicilian *bedda*.). Pitрэ explains that he received a written version in Italian from the collector, Salvatore-Pasquale Vigo, whose friend had made an Italian version of a story heard in dialect from a local informant. The tale is also unusual in the context of the Sicilian Vespers in presenting marriage to a Frenchman as a desirable goal, agreed to by the bride and her family. When the uprising interferes with those plans, the young couple maintain their romantic commitment despite politics and the father’s opposition. While this story would seem to be about true love triumphing over politics, a deeper reading suggests that it reflects the interests of a small pro-French minority within Sicily, and so it stands against the mainstream tradition regarding the Vespers.

## 215. The Society of the Holy Pauls—Li biati Pauli

Popular tradition makes frequent mention of what is essentially a vigilante society called “The Holy Pauls” (in Italian, “I Beati Pauli”). Pitrè cited several earlier authors who wrote about the Holy Pauls and noted that they were mentioned in a folksong in Salomone-Marino’s collection, *Canti popolari siciliani*. The Holy Pauls described in this tale operate in a manner similar to the Sicilian Mafia, which, as tradition explains, arose from the need to protect the common people from the abuse of authority by those in positions of power. But they are quite unlike the Mafia in their association with the Church and in being called “holy,” an epithet which reflects the admiration of the oppressed population that they served.

## 216. The Devils of the Zisa—Li diavuli di la Zisa

The Zisa is the name of a palace built on the S-SW periphery of Palermo by William the First (1154–60) and his son, an impressive structure in Moorish style with turrets, arcades, mosaics, and a magnificent fountain. The name Zisa comes from the Arabic *aziz*, meaning “splendid” or “shining.” The main arch leading to the great courtyard is surrounded with inscriptions in Arabic, which probably created the feeling of mysterious pagan power that pervades this tale.

Pitrè printed the following variant:

### *The Devils of the Zisa*

On the twenty-fifth of March, Annunciation Day, when people go to the Olivuzza, they go to see the devils of the Zisa. These devils are up on the ceiling, and there’s no way to know their number. One will count thirteen; one will say fifteen; and another will count even more. But there’s no way to ever know the truth, because people count and count, and sometimes the number is more and sometimes it is less. My guess is that it is because they are devils that they won’t let themselves be counted. And this is why, when it’s impossible to know the number of something, we say “It’s the number of devils in the Zisa!”<sup>317</sup>

*Told by Francesca Amato in Palermo.*

317 Pitrè’s footnote explains that people ate and drank so much that they were tipsy when they arrived at the Zisa on this feast day. Therefore, when they tried to count the figures they called devils, some of which were small and incomplete, it was impossible to arrive at a count everyone could agree on.

### 217. The Judges' Slope—La calata di li giudici

This tale can be read as a parody of the corrupt juridical system in nineteenth-century Sicily, in which ordinary people were powerless against the influence that money could buy for the wealthy. It is also a fantasy in which an ultimate source of justice does exist, in this case the King of Spain, who personally intervenes to save the “common man” (who is secretly of noble blood, conforming to a familiar folk tale pattern). Having this ultimate avenger come from outside of Sicily suggests that the people understood that the internal system was incapable of reforming itself. The historical personage behind the king in this tale is Charles I (1500–58), who became King of Spain, Sicily, Naples, Sardinia, and Spanish America in 1516 and, as Charles V, was made Holy Roman Emperor in 1519.

### 218. The Gambler's Stone—La pietra di lu Jucaturi

This tale describes a miracle that supposedly took place in 1482, and Pitrè cited no less than nine written accounts that report the same story. He also quoted a Latin inscription, installed in the Church of St. Agata in 1631, that summarized the event and dated it to 1482. This story also had some currency as a folk tale, having been reported from Naples, Milan, and Buda in Hungary, according to testimonies cited by Pitrè.

For modern readers, accustomed to a Christianity that places great emphasis on forgiveness and redemption, this tale portrays a surprisingly vindictive God and a Madonna who has no interest in forgiving. Such a vision, however, fits well with that part of Sicilian culture that views “appropriate” revenge as a duty and has given us the concept of “crimes of honor.”

### 219. The Courtyard of the Seven Fairies—Lu cortigghiu di li setti fati

Pitrè found this same supernatural tradition recorded in a dictionary of Palermo streets (Carmelo Piola, *Dizionario delle strade di Palermo*, p. 175). He gives the following quote.

“Cortile delle Sette Fate (Via Santa Chiara). It was recounted that every night the fairies would appear, and amidst dancing and other charming activities, they would take away some individual with them and have him observe the depth of the ocean, the immensity of heavenly space and even its abysses—in short, everything that is not given to mortals to see—and then at the first dawn light they would invisibly bring him back to the place from which he disappeared.”

Pitrè also noted a parallel in Schneller, “Einige Hexengeschichten,” *Märchen und Sagen aus Wälschtirol*.

## 220. The Cross of Santa Croce Church—La cruci di la chiesa di S. Cruci

This is the first of several tales that preserve memories of the Muslim occupation of Sicily. The Christians referred to are the Normans, who invaded in 1060 and eventually succeeded in overthrowing the Muslims, who controlled the island. This local “foundation” legend explains how the church acquired its present location and why its cross was important. Pitrè notes that the final paragraph was an addition by Vincenzo Palermo, another informant, who cited the same tradition. Pitrè explains that the *taratata* was a festival celebrated at the end of May in Casteltermini to honor this church, and he describes it as follows:

two long processions on horseback, at evening with torches, and four or five musical bands, with a great number of tambourines . . . and men in bizarre costumes who stage mock combats with swords. One of them is dressed like a king, accompanied by ministers and sages, and everyone takes turns bowing to him. The battle takes place to the rhythmic sound of the tambourines, which gives the festival its name.

He further adds that the combat is a joyous one and alludes to the creation of this cross by the Emperor Constantine.

## 221. Sabbedda’s Cave—La grutta di Sabbedda

This local legend explains how this cave got its name. Pitrè notes that around Capaci there are other caves with distinctive names, such as The Cave of the Hay, supposedly as big as a wood, which was used to store hay. There was also the Cave of Old Minica, named after an unfortunate woman murdered by the Saracens.

## 222. Valley of the Woman—Vaddi di la donna

This tale, like the preceding one, is a legend explaining how a certain locale got its name from the historical tradition of a woman being murdered there because she resisted sexual violation. Whereas the innocent maiden of tale 221 is repeatedly described as virtuous, the Saracen woman of this tale is given no such sympathetic epithets, and her resistance and murder are described matter-of-factly, with no trace of moral comment. The successful

campaign of Count Roger began in 1060 and is succinctly described in Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespers*, pp. 5–6.

223. Motta Rock, Summit of the Flag, and Valley of the Woman—La rocca di la Motta, serra di la bannera, e vaddi di la donna

This variant of the previous tale has a stronger anti-Saracen bias, attributing the murder of the Saracen woman to her own brothers. Pitrè says this tradition is found in Malaterra's *Cronache*, and he quotes a passage from Nicolò Palmeri's *Storia di sicilia* which gives a similar story: a noble young Saracen from Messina, with a beautiful sister, is fleeing from the Norman forces and decides to kill her rather than have her captured and suffer either rape or conversion to Christianity.

224. The Haunted Cave of Beautiful Peak—La grutta di lu pizzu beddu

This tale continues the series of local legends that derive from the period of the Arab domination of Sicily. Pitrè notes that tale 245 is based on this same tradition about the treasure guarded by spirits in the cave of Pizzu Beddu.

225. The Captain's Olive Tree—Lu pedi d'aliva di lu capitanu

This is a classic ghost story, with a haunted place at midnight, a corpse, and an enchanted object that cannot be caught and ends up vanishing. This mysterious object is the kind of flask made of animal skin (most often goat or sheep), called *utru* in Sicilian and *otre* in Italian, that has been used for centuries in the Mediterranean world and is mentioned as early as Homer's *Odyssey* (eighth century B.C.).

226. Marabedda Peak—Lu pizzu di Marabedda

This version of a "Cain and Abel" story continues a series of tales explaining the origin of certain place names. Pitrè mentions having heard a tale in S. Giuseppe Jato with the same title but different contents, in which Marabedda was a beautiful woman who used to go up the mountain on horseback to her castle. He also observes that the Sicilian name Marabedda is a contraction of Maria Bedda, "beautiful Maria," and that there was an old castle called Marabut, and this name probably lies behind the creation of both tales.

227. The Mountain of the Country Fair—*La muntagna di la fera*

This is a classic tale of “fairy gifts that vanish.” Pitrè collected a version in S. Giuseppe Jato which describes a fair held by fairies at midnight on the feast day of St. John, where fruit is made of false gold that appears real by moonlight. The existence of supernatural oranges made of gold is an ancient belief, perhaps a version of the golden apples that appear in Greek and Germanic myth as well as in other traditions, since the word for orange is literally “golden apple” in Greek, Latin, and other languages.

228. The Sacks of Gold on the Mountain—*Li vèrtuli di la muntagna di la fera*

Pitrè knew another version of this tale from Borgetto, in which the enchanted sacks were in a cave, hanging from a pole together with a rifle, a game pouch, and other hunting gear. He notes that in Palermo there existed a similar tradition concerning “Treasure Cave” (*Grutta di lu Tisoru*) on Mount Pelligrino, which could be reached only by the same impossible means.

229. Three Brothers Peak—*Lu pizzu di li tri frati*

This story continues the series of tales explaining how certain landscape features got their names, but it is distinctive in that it explains the particular shape of the rock. Pitrè cites a parallel tradition from Sardinia about a Turkish ship that was turned into a boulder because it offended Christian sensibilities, there being a statue of the Virgin at the port it was entering. We would add that the “petrified ship” is an old motif that appears as early as Homer’s *Odyssey*, where the Phaeacians’ ship, entering port, is turned to stone because they offended the god Poseidon.

230. The Bank of Ddisisa—*Lu bancu di Ddisisa*

Pitrè remarks that the tale 231 about the Rocca d’Antedda or the Rocca d’Anteddu is more or less the same, and he provides a similar version:

*The Peak of Gaddu (Pizzu Gaddu)*

At the first peak of these mountains there is a hole, and after descending, you can see a great treasury of money that’s been saved there. But after one has filled sacks with the money and wants to get out, he can’t because the hole

closes. It's been said that some people have gone down there with some good sacks and have brought a black dog with them to carry out the sacks, but the dog cannot get out until it throws off the sacks and not a coin remains. Then the dog can leave.

*Told by Vincenzo Rappa in Saint Giuseppe Jato e Camporeale*

Pitrè provides another variant:

*The Bank of Ddisisa—Lu bancu di Ddisisa*

This bank is in a cave, and there are many rooms in the cave, many, many. . . . In the last room of the caves there is someone seated at the threshold with a candle in his hand. When one enters, somebody sounds the drums, and one has to take the candle from the man at the threshold. If one takes the candle, one can get the treasure. If one is not ready to take the candle, one forfeits one's life. It can also be that whoever climbs down to fetch the money will get lost and not be able to get out.

*Told by a maid in Borgetto.*

With regard to the means necessary to open the treasures of Ddisisa in Camporeale, Pitrè writes that he was told that "this is the great treasure of antiquity, and one has to use guns to get the money from this bank." Pitrè adds that there are many similar tales throughout Sicily even in Palermo, where it is believed that there is a treasure in the rock of Gaipa (La Pietra della Gaipa) near the city, and he adds some references to these tales about buried treasures.

231. The Rock of Antedda—Rocca d'Antedda

This tale is comparable to the preceding legend, "The Bank of Ddisisa," and its variants. The comment by the Sultan of Constantinople is common in many of the similar tales in Pitrè's collection. See also 216, "The Devils of the Zisa."

232. The Mountain of Saint Cuonu—Lu muntagna di Santu Cuonu

233. The Rock of Pizziddu—La rocca di lu Pizziddu

The motif of the enchanted treasure and the impossibility of finding the right means to obtain the treasure is common in many of the tales of this type. In this collection, see tales 222, 228, 230, 231, 237.

234. The Little Church of Our Savior—La chisulidda di lu Sarvaturi

This tale is a typical religious legend in which a man caught in a cave where he finds a treasure promises to donate the treasure to the founding of a church.

235. The Stone of the Seven Mules—La petra di li setti muli

This tale is another religious legend that explains how a particular stone received its name thanks to the grace of God.

236. The Church of the Holy Annunciation—La crèsia di la S. Nunziata

This religious legend explains the founding of a church by incorporating aspects of the ghost tale.

237. The Tower of Saint Brancatu—La turri di S. Brancatu

Pitrè notes that the same tale was told in Palermo about the Tower of the Devils, an ancient structure with beautiful architecture in Guadagna near Palermo. According to Carmelo Piola's *Dizionario delle Strade di Palermo*, there is an old legend about this tower: a man made a bet and went one night to knock a nail into the wall inside this tower, and by mistake he hit the nail in such a way that a piece of his clothing became attached to the wall and he thought that he was caught by the devils.

238. The Peak—Lu pizzareddu

This tale and the next one are short warning tales that are connected to a legend.

239. The Basin of the Crows—La stràmula di lu corvu

240. The Mountain of the Rajah—La muntagna di lu Raja

241. The Throne of the Turk—La sèggia di lu turcu

At the foot of Mount Erice there is also a place called Seggiu where a voice stopped Giordano the son of Ruggiero from going to war against the Saracens of Erice about 1076.

242. The Castle of Ficarazzi—Lu casteddu di Ficarazzi

243. The Plain of the Threshing Floor—Lu chianu di l'aria

244. The Chasm—Xöni

This is one of the few tales that Pitрэ published in Italian. Since he did not understand Albanian, he had the tale told to him in Italian.

245. Keep Up your Courage, Don Mennu!—Curaggiu Don Mennu!

According to Pitрэ, this tale about the courage of Don Mennu was still popular among the people of Casteltermini. As a joke, the title is used to give someone encouragement.

In Gaetano Di Giovanni's book, *Notizie storiche su Casteltermini e suo territorio*, he notes that there was a real Don Vincenzo Menna Micchichè, a notary in Casteltermini from 1775–1820. The grotto is near the Pizzo di Pecoraro, and there is a tale called "La Grutta di Pizzu bellu."

The motif that focuses on the impossibility of leaving a treasure can be found in tales 230 and 231.

246. Live and Learn—Cchiù si campa e cchiù si sapi

This tale begins a series of stories purporting to explain the origin of certain proverbs in the oral tradition. Pitрэ had a profound interest in proverbs, and his collected works on Sicilian folklore, spanning many genres, include four volumes of proverbs, which are worth consulting for his rich documentation of parallel proverbs in various Italian dialects and, where known, their Latin originals. Of course the notion that a proverb derives from a single event, known and handed down in the oral tradition, is more fancy than fact.

247. For a Great Person, a Small Gift—A gran signuri picculu priseni

Pitрэ knew another version of this tale in which the king is specifically named as "Ferdinand I, the Bourbon." This ruler lived from 1751 to 1825 and was originally Ferdinand IV of Naples and later called Ferdinand I, King of the Two Sicilies (i.e., Naples and Sicily) from 1816 until his death. His presence in Sicily gave rise to many proverbs and anecdotes.

248. Between One Horn and the Other, You Can't Get at the Truth—  
D'un cornu all'òtru 'un si pò sapiri la viritati

This tale is a very clever way of making the point that different eye-witnesses tend to come away with differing interpretations of the same event.

249. Navarra Can't Hear the Words to this Song—Navarra nun la senti sta canzuna

Pitrè records this anecdote elsewhere in his *Saggi di critica letteraria*, p. 73. He mentions another version in which the two verses differ slightly: "Navarra will suffer pains and torments," and "This is a song Navarra cannot hear" (*Navarra patirà peni e turmenti, Navarra sta canzuna nun la senti*).

250. He Who Got Fire Survived, He Who Got Bread Died—Cu'appi focu campau, cu'appi pani muriu

This story explains the origin of a familiar traditional phrase and was a well-known anecdote that embodied a practical lesson about survival. Pitrè mentioned a version from Catania published in Antonio Longo's *Aneddoti siciliani*, and he also reproduced the following Palermitan version told by Francesca Campo to Salvatore Salomone-Marino.

Once there were two brothers, one poorer than the other, and each possessed only one copper coin. It was wintertime, when a man could die from all the cold and snow. Since these two brothers were homeless, they had to sleep in doorways at night. Well, when it began to grow dark, they said, "We each have one coin, so what should we buy this evening?"

"I'm getting myself some bread," said the first, "because I can't stand being so hungry."

"And I," said the second, "shall buy some small coals to make myself a little fire and warm up, because I'm freezing to death here."

And that's what they did.

Now the brother who bought the bread refused to share it with the other. So that when the second brother had lit his fire and the first tried to get close to it, the second brother rebuffed him, saying, "Stay away, brother! Since you refused to give me any of your bread, it's now every man for himself, and let God take care of us all."

That night, when they went to sleep in the doorway, the brother who had eaten the bread could not endure the cold, and so he died. But the one who

had warmed himself with the fire, although very hungry, endured it and survived. And it's from this incident that we have the saying, *He who got fire survived, and he who got bread died.*

251. God Will Send Help, and This Will Do the Rest!—Diu ti la manna bona!

Pitrè cites a parallel in Straparola, *Le piacevoli notti*, tale 13, night 8, where a certain Doctor of Laws has prepared in advance a miscellaneous list of sentences that he intends to hand out randomly when he serves as a judge. The portrait of doctors and judges who hand out random prescriptions and sentences is a clever fantasy that depicts the common people's feeling that they are helpless when subject to the capricious decisions of men in powerful professions. The doctor's repeated phrase contains genuine ambiguity, and perhaps a play on the word *tinta*, as discussed in our footnote to the text. We have used the entire phrase for our English title, making it longer than the original title, to include the whole of the irony.

252. Don't Tell Secrets to Women, Have Policemen as Friends, or Live in a House with a Trellis—Sigretu a fimmini 'un cunfidari, cumpari sbirri nun pigghiari, casa cu prèula 'un adduari

Some of these sayings or maxims had a wide circulation, according to Pitrè's citations. The first two appear in Naples in Somma's *Cento racconti* as tale 73, and the first one in Straparola, *Le piacevoli notti*, "Salardo figliuolo di Rainaldo." There are parallel versions to the anecdote of the ram's head in Casalicchio, *L'Utile col dolce* (II. VI. 4) and in the Giufà tales (190) in this collection. Note also that the husband tests his wife in exactly the same way in tale 169, "Never Trust a Woman!"

253. A Big Fight over a Bedspread—Tutta la sciarra è pi la cutra

This is another tale that purports to document the origin of a proverbial expression. It is not altogether clear what this proverb would normally refer to. It may have been used in quarrels that led to trivial or comic resolutions. It is possible that the saying existed first, and the tale was invented to explain it. The tale also fits the general pattern of stories about husbands and wives, where one spouse is revealed to be the foolish one, and the other exacts punishment.

254. Don't Say "Four" Till It's in the Bag—Nun diri quattru s'un l'hai 'nta lu saccu

This is yet another story allegedly explaining the origin of a proverb. We have the English equivalent of this proverb in "Don't count your chickens before they hatch."

255. "Let the Good Times Roll," Said the Mother-in-Law to the Daughter-in-Law—"Pigghia lu bon tempu e 'nfilatillu dintra," dissi la sòggiera a la nora

This anecdote or joke is based on a common Sicilian proverb.

256. The Caresses of Tinchuni—Li carizzii di Tinchuni

257. With the Scissors—Fòrfici fòru

Tale Type ATU 1365 B—Cutting with the Knife or the Scissors and ATU 1365—The Obstinate Wife

Pitrè states that there is a version in Modica that is worth mentioning because it is related to a common custom. There were two parties in Modica that were divided into two cults according to their devotion to saints: the Sampitrani lived inside the city and had Saint Peter as their protector, and the Sangiurgiani lived in upper Modica and glorified Saint George.

One time the Sangiurgiani captured a Sampitrano and ordered him to, "Cry out, Long Live Saint George!"

The follower of Saint Peter refused, and the others insisted that he follow their orders. So they tied a rope around him and lowered him into a well, dipping him into the water, but they were not able to persuade him to cry out "Long Live Saint George." Finally, after they pulled him out, he was persuaded and said, "Because the great Devil wants it, long live Saint George!"

Pitrè cites various books to indicate how popular the tale "Fòrfici fòru" was in Sicily and Italy: Longo, *Aneddoti siciliani*; Gradi, *Proverbi e modi di dire*; Coronedi-Berti, *Vocabolario bolognese-italiano*; Varchi, *L'Ercolano*; Fanfani, *Vocabolario dell'uso toscano*; and Casalicchio, *L'Utile col dolce*.

258. You're Taking Me from Cave to Cave, from North to South, Like a Yawn that Passes from Mouth to Mouth—*Mi vai purtannu di grutta 'n grutta, comu lu badàgghiu di vucca 'n vucca*

This proverb does not have an equivalent in the English language, but it is well known that yawns are catching.

259. The Man Who Had Scruples about a Drop of Milk—*Fàrisi scrupulu di la stizza di lu latti*

The scrupulous thief is a character who appears in numerous Italian folk tales.

260. Save the Goat and the Cabbages—*Sarvari crapa e cavuli*

Versions of this tale can be found in Casalicchio, *L'Utile col dolce* and in Imbriani, *La novellaja fiorentina*.

261. The Old Woman Said to King Nero: "The Worst Is Yet to Come"—*Dissi la vecchia a Niruni: "A lu peju nun cc'è fini."*

The same anecdote is told in Umbria with regard to the proverb: "The worst always comes after." Luigi Morandi published the following in *Saggio di proverbi umbri*: A certain old woman encountered Nero and said to him: "May you stay well and live for a thousand years."

The tyrant who knew he was hated by everyone was astonished by this greeting and responded to the old woman, "How is it, when everyone wishes I were dead, that you wish I would live a thousand years."

"Because the worst always comes after," said the poor woman. "I remember your grandfather, and he was very evil. Your father was a bit worse. Now I know you, and you're a devil! . . . What will happen to us if someone else were to come?"

In Giuseppe Giusti's *Proverbi toscani*, there is another tale based on the proverb, "May God protect you, my lord, because after you someone worse will come."

In Giuseppe Morosi's *Studi sui dialetti greci della Terra d'Otranto*, there is the following anecdote: Once there was a woman who always prayed that God should keep the king well. Some men told the king about this woman, and so the king summoned her and asked her why she prayed so much for him. And she said, "I pray to God that you should always remain alive because you just

swindle us. If you die, then someone else will come and be more of a glutton.”

262. As a Pear Tree You Never Produced Pears, and as a Saint You Don't Produce Miracles—*Piraru mai fascisti pira, e mancu santu fai miraculi*

Pitrè provided the following variants.

*You Never Produced Pears When You Were a Pear Tree, and Not Even When You're Jesus on a Cross Can You Produce Miracles (Piru mai facisti pira, e mancu crucifissu fai miraculi)*

Once upon a time there was a peasant who prayed to the crucifix and asked Jesus to make his son well. But instead of getting well, his son died. The crucifix was new and had been made out of a piece of a pear tree that had never produced pears. When the peasant learned about this, he said to the crucifix, “You never produced pears when you were a pear tree, and not even when you're Jesus on a cross can you produce miracles.”

*Told at Palermo.*

*When the Pear Tree Can't Produce Pears, the Saint Can't Produce Miracles (Nè piru pira, nè santu miraculi)*

Once upon a time there was a peasant who had a pear tree in his garden. Since the pear tree never produced pears, he had it cut down. After the tree was cut down, he sold it to someone who made sculptures. This sculptor made a beautiful statue of Saint Francisco of Paula and sent it to the church of the holy mother. All the people fervently adored the statue. One day the peasant went there and asked with all his heart and his eyes red with tears to let his dying son live. Just at that moment some people came and told him that his son had died. The poor man lost patience and cried out at the saint with crooked eyes, “I should have never prayed to you because I've known how useless you are: When the pear tree can't produce pears, the saint can't produce miracles!”

*Told at Borgetto.*

263. Anything Can Happen Except for a Man Getting Pregnant, and yet, There Was this Pregnant Man of Monreale—*Tutti cosi ponnu succediri, fora d'omini preni; eppuru cci fu lu prenu di Murriali*

This tale is only part of the tradition. According to Pitrè, the people say that in the dome of the church at Monreale there is an image of this pregnant man, and they also point to one in the mosaics that represent the miracle of Jesus Christ with the dropsy (*all'idropico*).

In another version of Borgetto the story is related as follows: A man from Monreale is sick and calls for the doctor, who wants to have a sample of urine. When the man's wife brings it to the doctor, she drops it, and so not to be scolded, she gives the doctor some of hers. By chance, she is pregnant, and the doctor, who thinks the urine belongs to the man, declares that he is pregnant. According to some people, this is the origin of the saying: the pregnant man of Monreale.

But according to Pitrè, perhaps the best and most simple explanation for the legend is provided by the Marquis di Villabianca:

The origins of "the pregnant man of Monreale" can be traced to the Abbot Corvino, born into the noble family Corvino of Palermo. He was a hermaphrodite, and in his youth he was predisposed to being a woman. He was impregnated by the Commander Carlo Castelli in the city of Monreale and gave birth to a daughter who was Girolama Castelli, who was wed to Leonardo Cadello, a nobleman from the city of Trapani. After giving birth, the woman Corvino became a man and stopped wearing women's clothes and dressed as a man. From then on he was called the Abbot Corvino.

See Francesco Maria Emanuele Villabianca, *Proverbi siciliani*.

264. Like the Fiancée with the Shaved Eyebrows—*Arristari comu la zita cu lu gigghiu rasu*

265. For a Single Calabrian Onion, Four Calabrians Lost their Lives—*Pi 'na cipudda di Calàvria si persiru quattru calavrisi*

This tale uses the explanation of a proverb's origin to mock the Calabrian people for their supposed stupidity and greed. These negative stereotypes existed throughout Italy, especially about people in nearby regions as were the Sicilians and Calabrians, and no doubt a similar anti-Sicilian proverb exists in Calabria. Pitrè's notes included a full version of the anti-Calabrian saying partially quoted at the beginning of the story. Pitrè adds that the same proverb was used in Palermo against other groups whose names ended in -isi, and

thus facilitated the rhyme. This kind of traditional saying that expresses stereotypical prejudices against local populations is familiar to folklorists, who have given it the French name *blaison populaire*.

266. Losing Both the Donkey and the Carobs—Cci appizau lu sceccu e li carrubbi

Here we have another story used to explain a proverb. People from the small village of Capaci are traditional scapegoats in the eyes of Palermitans, as seen more fully in tale 151, which satirizes their stupidity and clumsiness.

267. With God On My Side, I Can Laugh at the Saints—Mi vogghia beni Diu, ca di li santi si nni jocu e rju

This tale may be seen as a shrewd “people’s” satire on the Catholic propensity to give importance to so many saints. The proverb here takes the form of a neat rhymed couplet, which can be translated more literally as “Let God love me, since I mock the saints and laugh at them.”

268. In Palermo, You Need a Sack This Big!—Palermu, un saccu tantu!

Pitrè tells us that the handsome bronze statue in Piazza Bologni is of Emperor Charles V, the work of G. B. li Volsi di Tusa, who made it in 1630. Charles stands armed as a warrior, with his sword at his side, his left hand resting on a staff and his right hand raised as if swearing an oath. Pitrè adds that it was the non-Palermitan population that made up amusing stories that had the statue speaking proverbs based on the gesture of the raised right hand. The statue is still in existence, and so is the habit of country people who visit Palermo offering amusing interpretations of the gesture. Prof. Salvatore Nicosia informs me that a current saying is “in Palermo the dirt is this high,” because country people keep very neat houses and are appalled to find the city so dirty.

269. In Jibbisu, They Whip Roosters—Jibbisoti, frustajaddi

The title of this proverbial tale was a traditional insult in the province of Messina, the target being the people of the small town of Gessu (Jibbisu in the local dialect). Pitrè heard the tale in conversation with a fisherman whom he had asked for directions.

## 270. The Carinisi Are Dogs!—Cani Carinisi!

The story of the Baroness of Carini has been preserved in a short Sicilian epic poem, *La Barunissa di Carini*, whose variants run from 250 to 300 lines. Salvatore Salomone-Marino published an edition in 1873 and a revised and expanded version in 1914. Both versions can be found in a special supplement to the journal *Arba Sicula* in 1986, with an excellent introduction and an English translation by Anthony M. Cinquemani. On December 4, 1563, Laura Lanza, wife of Vincenzo La Grua e Talamanca, Baron of Carini, was murdered by her father, Cesare Lanza, because she was having a love-affair with her cousin, Ludovico Vernagallo.

Popular tradition quickly made her a heroine punished for merely falling in love. She was portrayed not as an adulteress but a victim of her father's savage revenge, and this is the view taken in the poem. The fact that "The Carinisi are Dogs!" became an injurious epithet in popular tradition confirms a strong bias in favor of the victim.

## 271. Brancaliuni!—Brancaliuni!

## Tale Type ATU 125B—Contest between Donkey and Lion

This story can be found in Straparola's *Le piacevoli notti*, tale 2, night 10, and the name of the ass is the same: Brancaleone. In this tale, an ass flees a monastery (*monaio*) and arrives on top of a mountain. There he meets a lion and asks for his name. The lion tells him that he is called lion, and the ass says his name is Brancaleone. Challenged to prove that he really is the "lion's claw" (Brancaleone), the ass eventually triumphs over the lion. There is also the wolf, who preys on the ass, and an encounter with the wolf. Along with the lion, the wolf becomes scared of the ass, and they flee from him.

The basis for the variants can be found in *Brancaleone, historia piacevole et morale, dalla quale può ciascun avere utilissimi documenti per governo di se stesso e d'altri, scritto già da Latrobio filosofo et hora dato in luce da Ieromino Triultio* (Milan: Giovanni B. Alzato, 1610). Editions were also published in Venice, 1607; Pavia, 1612; and Milan, 1682. In one version by Giorgio Besozzi, who was in the service of Carlo Borromeo in Milan, the ass is adorned splendidly, and when the lion approaches and asks the ass who he is, the ass is stiff and standoffish and demands on the contrary to know the name of the lion. So the lion states his name, and the ass replies, "If you are the lion, then I am Brancaleone." Then the plot continues as in the other versions of this tale.

For other variants, see the tale "Vertrag zwischen Herrn und Diener wegen

der Reue” by Sora translated from the Neapolitan dialect and published by Köhler in *Italianische Volksmärchen* and *Prima versione dei discorsi degli animali e altre prose* by Agnolo Firenzuola. In this latter version there is a lion that becomes frightened by an ox because it is an animal that he has never seen before.

## 272. The Two Mice—Li dui surci

This story is related to the tale type ATU 112—Country Mouse Visits Town Mouse. Generally speaking, the tale does not end tragically. Rather, the country mouse, who visits a town mouse is so frightened by a cat or by the cat’s owner that it flees back to the safety of its own house in the country, even though there is not much food there.

One other variant can be found in Pitрэ, “Lu surci magru e lu surci grassu,” *Otto fiabe e novelle*.

## 273. The Man, the Wolf, and the Fox—L’omu, lu lupu e la vurpi

Tale Type ATU 155—The Ungrateful Serpent Returned to Captivity

The title of Pitрэ’s tale is somewhat misleading because the lion plays the major role in saving the man, not the fox.

Normally the major “protagonist” of this fable is a snake, and it is one of the oldest fables in the world. Its origins can be traced back to the *Panchatantra* (c. 100 BC), which began to be circulated in Europe in the eleventh century and was also known under the name *The Fables of Bidapi*. There are also versions in *Disciplina Clericalis* by Petrus Alfonsi, the *Roman de Renart*, and the *Gesta Romanorum* (Deeds of the Romans, fourteenth century).

There is another version in Laura Gonzenbach’s *Sicilianische Märchen* with the title “Lion, Horse, and Fox.” In this tale a lion falls into a hole. A horse frees it, but the lion wants to eat it. They appeal to a fox to decide what should be done. The fox wants to see how the situation was when the lion was in the hole and freed by the horse. When the lion returns to the hole and descends, the fox throws a rock on top of him and kills him.

Other variants can be found in Morosi, *Studi sui dialetti greci di Terra d’Otranto*, Casalicchio, *L’Utile col dolce*, and Comparetti, “Gli ingrati” in *Novelline popolari italiane*.

Pitрэ provided the following interesting version.

*The Shoemaker and the Lion (Lu scarparu e lu liuni)*

Once upon a time, so it's been told, there was a shoemaker who had four daughters. This poor man wandered about and came to a street and cried out, "Bring your shoes for repair! Soles and heels!" But nobody called him, and he moved on.

"What a mistake! I'll take this other street."

Then he cried out, "Bring your shoes for repair! Soles and heels!"

But nobody called him, and he said to himself, "There's nothing I can do. Nothing to do!"

In short he went through the town, and nobody summoned him.

"I might as well go home and see if my wife and daughters have managed to get something and will give me something to eat."

When he arrived at his house, his sons were expecting that he would bring something to eat. When their father entered, the sons cried out, "Oh father, what have you got? What do you have in your shoe box?"

The daughters, who were sewing socks, threw them and some stones on the ground and ran and threw themselves on his shoe box. The poor father was startled!

"Daughters," he said, "what are you doing? I haven't brought anything. I don't have a cent. Have you managed to earn anything?"

"Nothing, father. We're all hungry."

"It's noon, and we're all hungry! But tomorrow I'll run all over and break my legs for you, and I'll certainly earn something."

The daughters sat down in the middle of the house near the hearth, and their father began to think over things.

"Daughters, do you know what I've just thought? Tomorrow we'll all go pick some vegetables to make a minestrone soup."

The next morning they departed to gather vegetables to make a minestrone soup. When they arrived at the mountain called Rocca d'Antedda,<sup>318</sup> they began to collect wild cabbage, fennel, chicory, and anything they came across, and they put them into baskets and sacks and got ready to depart. All at once their father heard a loud cry and said to his daughters, "I've got to go and see where the cry is coming from."

"Father, we can't linger here anymore. We must return home to put the vegetables in a pan on the fire."

"All right, you all go and prepare the minestrone, and I'll come afterwards."

318 See tale 231. This is the Rock of Entella.

The shoemaker didn't want his daughters to become frightened, and so he remained alone and went to see where the cry came from. He moved along the rocks of the mountain and heard a voice crying out: "Oh friend, come and help me. I'm stuck in a cave. When the poor shoemaker heard this voice, he went the mouth of the cave and saw a rock that had fallen right in front of the entrance to the cave. Whoever was inside could not get out, and the shoemaker said, "My friend, tell me how you got inside."

"My friend, the night before I went into the cave to sleep, and during the night the rock fell in front of the entrance."

"Well, what do you want me to do?" the shoemaker asked.

"I want you to push the rock from the outside, and I'll do it from the inside so that I can get out."

"I'm going to help you, but I want to know who you are. Are you human or a beast?"

"My friend, I'm a lion."

"Mercy! Should I really help you get out? Perhaps it would be better if I left you here. Certainly, if I let you out and you're hungry, you'll certainly eat me."

"What! You'll be my close friend! After you save my life, do you think I would eat you? I'd be a villain, a traitor! Enough! Try to help me. If you do, I'll do you a favor and won't harm you."

The poor shoemaker let himself be persuaded by the beast and helped it get out safely. When the lion was out, he thanked the shoemaker immensely, took his leave, and went on ahead of the shoemaker.

As soon as the lion had gone some distance, he began to yawn and stretch out, and when the shoemaker arrived, the lion called out, "My friend, one moment! Wait, I want to give you a present."

The poor shoemaker waited for the lion who stuck its tail out and began to jump up and run over to his friend.

"My friend," said the lion, "what did you expect? I can't keep to my promise, because my eyes are popping from my head with hunger. It's got to be you or someone else."

"I told you that you were always a beast. Is this how you keep your word? Remember, you said you wouldn't touch me and would let me go free."

"All right, listen to what I propose to do so that you'll learn that whoever does a good deed will be repaid poorly. We'll both begin walking, and we'll ask the first person we meet what a person deserves if he does a good deed. If the person says he deserves to be repaid poorly, I'll eat you. If the person says, he deserves to be repaid well, I'll let you go."

As they were walking, they encountered an ass and asked, "What does a person deserve if he does a good deed?"

“He should be repaid poorly,” the ass answered.

“What did I tell you?”

Then they met a wolf and asked what a good person deserved who did a good deed, and he replied that he deserved to be repaid poorly.

“What did I tell you?” said the lion. “That’s two out of three, and all I need is one more to eat you (because he had said they had to meet three people). They continued walking and came across a fox, and they asked, “Does a person who does a good deed deserve to be repaid?”

“Not at all,” said the fox.

When the poor shoemaker heard this response, he froze like an icicle. The poor man was depressed and looked at the fox. In turn, the fox understood what the poor shoemaker wanted to say, and so he said, “What did you mean when you asked that question?”

So they told him everything that had happened, and the fox said, “The only way to make a just decision is if you take me to the place where everything happened.”

While they walked toward the cave, the lion went on in advance and was very happy while the shoemaker confided in the fox.

“If you manage to liberate me from this murderer, I’ll give you eight hens and a rooster.”

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll get you out of this, but don’t forget the promise you’re making.”

“Oh, my friend, how could I forget it?”

When they reached the cave, he told the lion that he had to go back inside.

“I’ve got to see how the situation was before I can judge.”

The lion went inside the cave and began to move the rock where it was before, and the fox asked, “Was that where the rock was?”

“There was another rock in front of me, because I could barely see any light, and now I can see some.”

“I’ll put the rock where it was,” the fox said.

“Now it’s just like it was,” said the lion.

“All right, you stay where you are, and the poor shoemaker will remain outside with me.”

“Please let me out. I won’t touch him.”

“You’re going to stay right where you are, whether you touch him or not. You can stay there while he goes and takes care of his affairs.”

Together the fox and the shoemaker departed and headed toward the village. When they arrived there, the fox said to him, “My dear friend, I can’t enter the village. If you are my friend, then you’ll go into the village and get the chickens, and I’ll wait for you here outside.”

"But why don't you come with me to my house, and I'll get the chickens for you. Why do you want to stay out here?"

"I can't go with you because if some dogs see me—they are my enemies—they'll attack me."

"All right. Wait here a moment, and I'll go get the chickens."

The shoemaker went to a butcher and borrowed a large dog and took him on a rope to the fox. Meanwhile, the fox kept looking for his friend with the hens and rooster, and saw him approach with something. The fox was very happy and said, "He's a man of his word! He's really bringing the rooster. I can see it wagging its tail. That poor rooster!"

As the shoemaker approached the fox, the dog began to bark, and the shoemaker cried out, "Attack him, dog! Attack the fox!"

"You traitor!" the fox cried out. "Is this the way you repay a good deed?"

"Yes, it is! You're the one who said a good deed didn't deserve to be repaid!"

*Collected by Leonardo Greco at Salaparuta.*

## 274. Wind, Water, and Honor—*Lu ventu, l'aqua e l'onuri*

This story is a parable and can be found in Straparola's *Le piacevoli notti*, tale 2, night 11, "Vento, l'acqua e la vergogna." Pitrè also included a variant by Gaspare Gozzi in its entirety.

### *Smoke, Water and Honor (Il fuoco, l'acqua e l'onore)*

Smoke, Water and Honor came together and formed a little community for a while. However, Smoke could not stay put in one place very long, and Water also had to move about. Given their inclinations, they convinced Honor to take a trip with them. However, before they departed, all three of them said that they needed to agree upon a signal so they could locate one another if they were ever separated.

"If this should ever happen to me and we are separated, just remember that you'll find me wherever you see smoke. That's my signal, and you'll certainly find me where there's smoke."

"And me," Water said, "if you lose sight of me, don't look for me where there's dry or cracked land, but where there are willow and elder trees, reeds, and very tall green grass. That's where I'll be if you are trying to track me down."

"As far as I am concerned," said Honor, "keep open your eyes wide open, keep on top of me, and hold on to me firmly because if misfortune should lead me astray until I become lost, you'll never find me again."

## 275. Friend Wolf and Friend Fox—Cumpari lupu e cummari vurpi

Tale Type ATU 15\*—The Fox Entices the Wolf Away from his Booty

This is a typical animal tale in which the fox outsmarts the wolf.

## 276. The King of the Animals, the Wolf, and the Fox—Lu re di l'armali, lu lupu e la vurpi

This is one of the oldest stories in Europe and can be found in the works of Carlo Gozzi, Carlo Casalicchio, and Venerando Gangi. Pitre also provided the following variant.

*The Lion, the Wolf, and the Fox (Lu liuni, lu lupu e la vurpi)*

Once upon a time the king of the animals fell sick, and all the animals went to visit him. He instructed them about one thing or another. However, the fox did not appear, and the wolf denounced him in front of the lion, who became very indignant and decided to make him pay with his life. Since the fox could do nothing about this, he decided one day to pay the king a visit. When the lion saw him, he said, "How dare you come to visit me?"

"Your majesty, let me explain."

"What do you have to say, you rogue?"

"I've learned that if you want to get well, you need the feet of the wolf. This way all the bad fevers that you have will be absorbed by the feet."

The lion gave orders to the lions that, when the wolf entered the palace, he was to be skinned. When the wolf came, he was received dryly by the king, and the lions quickly were on his back and tore him apart. The wolf felt all burned up and bruised and ran away to lick his wounds. Thinking about what had happened, he could not have any peace of mind until he reached his home and said to the wolf cubs, "Do you see what the disgusting fox has managed to cause? . . . If the fox comes by here, I command you to rip him apart."

The fox was a fool, but he did not stick his nose outside the palace of the lion. One time, however, he had to go outside, and the wolf cubs were on top of him and seized him tightly.

"You tore off the skin of our father," they said, "and now we're going to tear off the skin from your back."

*Told by a man named Giglio at Ficarazelli.*

## 277. The Fox—La vurpi

Tale Type ATU 32—The Wolf Descends into the Well in One Bucket and Rescues the Fox in the Other

There is a variant in *Novella di Cacasenno, figlio del semplice Bertoldino* (Milan: Fr. Pagnoni, 1870). A fox falls on top of a bucket in a well in which there are many fish, and the other bucket (there are two, one that has fallen while the other that was already lowered down) rises up. The fox cannot get out of the well and moans and groans until a bear comes and asks him why he is lamenting.

“Because I can’t get the fish out of the well and I can’t eat them,” the fox replied. “Why don’t you come down here and eat them?”

The bear lowers himself down in the other bucket, and the fox rises in his bucket, and this is how he got out of the well.

There is another version in Coronedi-Berti’s *La fola dèl muretein*, in which a fox gets revenge on a wolf that has eaten his fox cubs. He ties the wolf to a cord and lowers the wolf into a well to drink. When the wolf is down in the water, the fox lets go of the rope. The wolf drowns.

## 278. The Little Bird—L’Acidduzzu

## 279. The Wolf and the Cardinal—Lu lupu e lu cardidduzzu

Tale Type ATU 20D\*—Pilgrimage of the Animals, ATU 130—The Animals in Night Quarters, and ATU 210—Rooster, Hen, Duck, Pin and Needle on a Journey

This story not only mocks the rooster’s vanity, but it also makes fun of his illiteracy and those of his companions. The tale is a pastiche of different fables which can be found in the works of the Brothers Grimm, Korn, Vernaleken, Haltrich, Waldau, Grundtvig, and Campbell. Laura Gonzenbach published a Sicilian variant, “The Rooster Who Wanted to be Pope,” in *Sicilianische Märchen*.

## 280. The Grasshopper and the Ant—La cicala e la frummìcula

Tale Type ATU 280A—The Ant and the Cricket

Pitrè published a poetic version of this famous fable in *Centuria di canti popolari siciliani ora per la prima volta pubblicati da G. Pitrè* (Padova, 1872).

There are numerous versions of this fable in Europe beginning with Aesop, Aviani, Gozzi, and La Fontaine. The story about the ant that collects food for the winter during the summer while a cricket sings is known widely throughout the world. When the cricket asks for food in the winter, the ant generally refuses and tells the cricket to dance. But sometimes the ant can be generous. Whatever the case may be, the fable celebrates asceticism and hard work.

## 281. King Crystal—Lu Re Cristallu

Tale Type ATU 425A—The Animal as Bridegroom, ATU 425B—Son of the Witch, and ATU 313—The Magic Flight

There are four important variants of this tale type in Pitre's collection: tale 17, "Marvizia," tale 18, "The King of Love," tale 19, "The Slave," and tale 33, "King Animmulu."

## 282. The Curious Wife—La muglieri curiusa

Tale Type ATU 670—The Man Who Understands Animal Languages

In Straparola's *Le piacevoli notti*, there is a similar tale, tale 6, night 3. "Frederico da Bozzolo, who understands the language of the animals, is constrained by his wife to tell her a secret and strangely dies." In the home the rooster sings, and the dog reprimands him for singing when he should be sad because of the death of their master. The rooster responds by saying that the master was weak and foolish because he didn't take charge of his wife while he, the rooster, rules over one hundred hens. Instead of a father confessor, there is a notary (lawyer).

## 283. The Stepmother—La parrastra

Tale Type ATU 450—Little Brother and Little Sister

Laura Gonzenbach published two similar versions, "Maria and her Brother" and "Sabedda" in *Sicilianische Märchen*. For the most well-known literary sources, see Basile, "Ninnillo and Nennella," *Lo cunto de li cunti*; Perrault, "Little Tom Thumb," *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*; Mme d'Aulnoy, "Finette Cendron," *Les contes de fées*; Grimm, "Hansel and Gretel" *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.

The popularity and importance of the tales in the European oral and

literary tradition may be attributed to the themes of child abandonment and abuse. Although it is difficult to estimate how widespread child abandonment was, it is clear that lack of birth control, famines, and poor living conditions led to the birth of many children who could not be supported and became unwanted. There was always tension when a new mother or stepmother replaced a mother who may have died from childbirth. In the Middle Ages it was common to abandon these children in front of churches, in special places of village squares, or in the forest. Sometimes the abandonment and/or abuse was due to the re-marriage of a man or woman who could not tolerate the children from a previous marriage. When the children are abandoned in the fairy tales, they do not always have an encounter with a witch, but they do encounter a dangerous character who threatens their lives, and they must use their wits to find a way to return home. Given the manner in which the tale celebrated the patriarchal home as haven, “Hansel and Gretel” became one of the most favorite of the Grimms’ tales in the nineteenth century. Ludwig Bechstein wrote a similar version in his *Deutsches Märchenbuch*, probably based on the Grimms’ tale, while Engelbert Humperdinck produced his famous opera *Hänsel und Gretel* in 1893. In the Italian tradition, important folk tales of this type can be found in the collections of Bernoni, Imbriani, and Nerucci. The most thorough treatment of this tale type is Regina Böhm-Korff’s *Deutung und Bedeutung von “Hänsel und Gretel”*. This study traces the historical development of different versions and pays careful attention to the motif of food and famine in the tale as well as the motif of abandonment.

#### 284. The Hermit—Lu rimitu

This tale may be related to Tale Type ATU 1425—Putting the Devil into Hell, in which an innocent young woman goes into the wilderness to ask a hermit how she might best lead a pious life. Instead of helping her, the hermit seduces her by making her believe she is sending the devil back to hell if she has intercourse with him.

Pitrè’s strange story changes the situation because the wife is already unfaithful, and she appears to bewitch the hermit. It is difficult to estimate how much blame should be placed on the hermit for his excessive anger and how much should be placed on the steward for forcing the unwilling hermit to “exorcise” his unfaithful wife. The description of the long pursuit is intended as high comedy and was no doubt recounted with vivid drama by the storyteller, but it lacks clarity in a few places.

## 285. The Lovely Maiden—La bedda picciotta

Many of the themes in this tale occur elsewhere in this collection, e.g., the hero falling in love with a portrait of the heroine, the use of drugged wine to overcome a villain, the heroine disguised as a man, the hero(ine) obtaining a position as secretary to a king, and the heroine offering her services as the only person capable of curing the lovesick prince. Even the small detail of one month's delay before the final cure occurs frequently elsewhere.

## 286. The Dropped Spindle—Lu fusu cadutu

This tale is unusual for its length and elaboration of realistic mundane detail, particularly concerning female accoutrements. Pitrè comments that it contains nothing that is not realistic and that its form is extremely natural and relaxed. And yet the young woman's idea about her destiny, and its instant acceptance by the gentleman, are as unrealistic as could be. In addition, the motif of sitting by a window and waiting for a fortunate encounter is common in numerous fairy tales. In short, the tale presents a romanticized and idealistic vision of a girl from a poor lower class "marrying up" in the world. This point of view may be seen in the tale's mundane preoccupation with material acquisitions and their cost, and with keeping the reputation of the unmarried young women above reproach.

## 287. The Faithful Little Horse—Lu cavadduzzu fidili

Tale Type ATU 900—King Thrushbeard, Tale Type ATU 884B—Girl Dressed as Man Deceives King, Tale Type ATU 707—The Three Golden Children, Tale Type ATU 531—The Clever Horse

Pitrè observed that this tale combines themes from several other stories. The opening resembles tale 105, "The Finicky Princess," and, Pitrè adds, is even more similar to "Brisla in Barba" in Coronedi-Berti, *Favole bolognesi*. A heroine in male disguise obtains employment as a king's secretary (and in other roles as well) in Gonzenbach, "The Princess and King Chichereddu," *Siciliane Märchen*. A king who goes off to war leaving behind a pregnant wife is found in tale 36, "The Herb-Gatherer's Daughters"; and a horse who gives wise counsel is found in tale 34, "The Enchanted Horse," and tale 70, "Filippeddu." Given what we now know about oral traditions, instead of describing this tale as composed of elements already known from other tales, we should understand that all these themes were in the tradition, and any tale could be created by selecting and combining a group of such themes.

## 288. The Little Doll—La pupidda

## Tale Type ATU 571C—The Biting Doll

The first part of this tale follows the familiar pattern of a magical gift given to the heroine which makes her family rich and provokes the envy of neighbors, who are then punished deservedly for stealing the magical object. The second part of the story, beginning when the king goes hunting, continues the focus on excrement which is a hallmark of this tale and gives it a vivid comical twist. The magic doll that excretes gold is reminiscent of the bird that does the same in tale 25, “The Silversmith,” and the donkey called *lu sceccu cacadinari*, who appears in Sicilian jokes and oral tales. This tale type has a wide distribution in Europe, and is even found in South America, the West Indies, Turkey, and China. The earliest Italian versions are Straparola, *Le piacevoli notti*, tale 5, night 2 (“Adamantina, figliuola di Bagolana Savonese”), and Basile, *Lo cunto de li cunti*, V, 1 (“La Papara”), both of which have a goose that defecates gold.

## 289. The Lion—Lu liuni

## Tale Type ATU 854—The Golden Ram

This tale is a very close variant of tale 96, “The Golden Eagle,” even to the point of using the same two verses (although in reverse order). Other Sicilian variants include tale 95, “The Symphonic Eagle,” and Gonzenbach, “The Golden Lion,” in *Sicilianische Märchen*. Pitre observed that tale 97, “The Abbot without Worries,” begins with the same motif of a king deciding to test a prominent person’s claim to absolute freedom. This tale type has an extensive history in Europe and elsewhere, described in the note to tale 95.

## 290. Art Departs, and Nature Will Prevail—L’Arti si parti e la natura vinci

This is another tale claiming to explain the origin of a proverb or maxim by creating a story that is an ideal frame for the traditional expression. Although this tale is not formally connected to a tale type, it is reminiscent of the Aesopic fable tradition and has affinities with ATU 133\*, The Goat Carries the Snake Over a Stream, in which the snake reverts to its true nature and kills the goat. “Nature always asserts itself” (motif U 124 in Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*) is the point shared by our tale and ATU 133\*.

Pitrè cited a parallel in a fable of Giovanni Meli called “The Cat, the Stranger, and the Abbot” (“Lu gattu, lu frusteri, e l’abati”).

291. Even Pirollu Was Destroyed!—Nni l’annittaru a Pirollu!

Here is another tale meant to explain the origin of a proverbial expression. “The Sciacca Affair” (in Italian, *Il caso di Sciacca*) was discussed by many historians known to Pitrè, whom he cites in his commentary. Among them is his colleague Salvatore Salomone-Marino, whose book *La storia nei canti popolari siciliani* mentions the proverb on p. 14. The fullest account known to Pitrè was Francesco Savasta, *Il famoso caso di Sciacca*.

292. By Making his Point, St. Martin Lost his Cloak—Pi lu puntu S. Martinu persi la cappa

This proverb was widely diffused in Italy and France and generally means “by a hair’s breadth, Martin lost his cloak,” the equivalent of English “For want of a nail, the shoe was lost.” It is not clear that Martin originally referred to St. Martin, but since the story of this saint giving his cloak to a beggar is so popular in European legend and painting, the connection was inevitably made. There is a discrepancy between the normal meaning of the proverb and its meaning in this tale, arising from the ambiguity of *pi lu puntu* (Italian *per il punto*). This phrase normally means “by a tiny bit,” “by a hair’s breadth,” but in this tale it must refer to the “point” of always giving charity as a principle of St. Martin’s. Pitrè was aware of the discrepancy, and admitted that this tale was “not the best explanation of the proverb,” but he remained perplexed over any solution. See the endnote to 293 for further details about this proverbial expression.

293. By One Point, Martin Lost “The Cape”—Pri un puntu Martinu pirdiu la cappa

Here we have a totally different explanation of the same proverb that the preceding tale uses. St. Martin and his cloak have been replaced by a gambler named Martin, and the word *cappa* has been taken to mean “cape” in the geographical sense. This tale and tale 292 both look like attempts to make up a story to explain a pre-existing proverb. Pitrè quotes Sardinian, Tuscan, and French versions of this same proverb, which include stories with differing explanations. In one Tuscan version Brother Martin was prior of a convent called La Cappa, which had a Latin inscription over its door saying, “Let the

door stay open. It will not be closed to any honest man.” Martin moved the period so that the statement read, “Let the door stay open to nobody. It will be closed to any honest man.” He was removed from his office, and so lost “The Cape” over one “point” or “period” (*puntu* has both meanings). This story and proverb also exist in the French oral tradition, although most French versions have Martin losing his donkey rather than his cape or an abbey. Because St. Martin of Tours had spent most of his career in France, it is quite possible that he is the original figure behind all these proverbs.

294. Without a Good Knot, the Stitch Won’t Hold—Pi ’un fari lu gruppiddu si perdi lu puntiddu

This comic tale hinges on the ambiguity in the Sicilian word *gruppiddu*, which can mean either knot or a cluster of knots making up a knotted string purse. The grandmother’s statement that she will leave her granddaughter her *gruppiddu* strongly suggests she is referring to the purse, whereas what she really meant to leave was advice on sewing a knitted purse (unless she was deliberately sly and meant to mislead her granddaughter, which is also possible). The grandmother’s words are literally “I will leave you my gruppiddu,” which our translation has expanded to “I will leave you the secret of my purse,” to maintain the ambiguity in English.

295. What a Disaster for the Three Ladies!—Tri donni e chi mali cci abbinni!

This anecdote and its accompanying proverb derive from a rebellion in Naples in 1243 that certain barons led against Frederick I, King of Sicily, who was also Holy Roman Emperor under the title Frederick II. The revolt was part of a larger struggle between Frederick and Pope Gregory IX, who had excommunicated Frederick and was encouraging all loyal Christians to oppose him. Pitre cites historical sources documenting the fact that several rebellious barons were tortured and killed, and their wives and children taken to Palermo and buried alive. This historical tradition adds that when the bodies were excavated many years later, they were found perfectly intact and fully dressed, with no signs of decay.

296. The Treasure of the Zisa—Lu tisoru di la Zisa

For the legendary riches of the Zisa palace, see tale 216, “The Devils of the Zisa,” and its endnote. This story of an encounter with devils is unusual in

that the devils do no harm, but only a mischievous prank that allows them to mock the servants and the abbey. Although these two tales present completely different stories about the Zisa, they conclude with the same wishful fantasy that some day the city of Palermo will be enriched by all these supernatural treasures.

## 297. The Peasant and the King—*Lu viddanu e lu re*

Tale Type ATU 921—The Four Coins and ATU 922 B—The King's Face on the Coin

This story was very popular as exemplum in the Middle Ages in the Orient and Europe and was spread in sermons, stories, novellas, and primers. There is a version that dates back to the fourth century, and aside from the variant in the *Gesta Romanorum* (*Deeds of the Romans*, fourteenth century), there are many similar tales in collections of sermons and exempla from the fourteenth through the nineteenth century. Laura Gonzenbach published a very similar version, “The Clever Farmer,” in *Sicilianische Märchen*.

## 298. *Pinnìculu Pinnàculu Pinnía*—*Pinnìculu pinnàculu pinnía*

The title of this tale is the first line of a riddle that was in oral circulation all over Italy. A riddle may be defined as a brief, disguised statement describing a hidden identity which can be guessed if the “blocking” element is solved. The description in this riddle is especially obscure, because it consists mostly of nonsense verse, so that the blocking element is enormous:

*pinnìculu pinnàculu pinnía,  
s'un era pinnìculu pinnàculu muría.*

But some of it can be deciphered as follows. The second line does reflect the story by stating that “if it weren't for x, y would have died,” so we can understand “*pinnìculu*” as the pear that fell and “*pinnàculu*” as the sleeping merchant. *Pinnìculu* and *pinnàculu* are variants of one another and suggest a high roof ridge (Italian *pennacolo*). Underlying these two words as well as the following word *pinnía* is the Sicilian verb *penniri* or *pinniri* (Italian *pendere*), so we have the suggestion of something hanging high up. *Pinnía* can literally mean “was hanging” (Italian *pendeva*), reinforcing the same image. In the story, the hanging pears were described as swinging back and forth, *li pira pinnuliavanu*, so that the word for swinging, *pinnulivanu*, may also be evoked by the pattern of sound and imagery contained in these nonsense-verses.

Pitrè cites a Venetian version of this riddle from Bernoni, *Indovinelli popolari veneziani* as follows:

Pico picandolo che picolava,  
 Dormi dormacolo, sì che dormiva.  
 Se no ghe giera pico picandolo che picolava,  
 Dormi dormacolo no se desmissiava.

Although it is similarly nonsensical and obscure, the explanation that Pitrè quotes from Bernoni confirms the connection with our Sicilian story: “He was someone sleeping under a pear tree, who was awakened by a pear that fell on his head.”

### 299. The Devotee—La divota

This story offers a slightly awkward combination of two separate kinds of tales: a religious tale about St. Joseph rewarding his devotee and the familiar traditional story of the sick prince who can be restored to health only by the heroine. The religious tale is made to serve as the outer frame to the traditional story of a poor girl who marries a prince. The title, “The Devotee,” is not perfectly appropriate, since the heroine shows no religious “devotion” in the normal sense but is offered to the saint by her father. Like many other religious stories, it wishes to make the moral point that poverty is not to be equated with inferiority (even St. Joseph is emphatically shabby), yet the ending partly contradicts this message by extolling wealth as the goal of the good life.

### 300. A Rare King—Un re raru

This is a simple morality tale that clearly reflects the world-view of the hard-working peasant and disdain for the lazy, corrupt gentility seen at their worst. It is not clear which king is being referred to in this allegedly true story. The most famous was Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, who ruled in Palermo as King Frederick I, but he had a reputation for severity, the opposite of the king in our story. The title makes clear that a king of these benign qualities was highly unusual.

# Bibliography



The bibliography consists of all the books to which we have referred and most of the books that Pitrè used as references. In many instances, Pitrè's references could not be located because the books were either pamphlets or books that are very rare. In addition, Pitrè was not always exact in compiling his references, and we have taken the liberty to correct titles, dates, and places of publication whenever needed.

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